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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

The Wild Lords

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Patrick McEvoy

Of old, the nobles of Waterdeep took haughty pride in their bloodlines and birthrights. Few could marry into the ranks of the nobles without being swallowed up in the manners and trappings of nobility, and nobles shunned those who refused to act "higherborn than the common unwashed," as one broadsheet put it. Those deemed unworthy would have doors literally slammed in their faces, find lords and ladies turning away from them rather than talking to them at public functions, and receive no invitations for feasts, revels, and high-society social gatherings. Even great wealth could not buy a title or a seat at most nobles' high tables in these earlier days.

Yet as times change, unyielding armor shatters, and customs fade. These days, the same unwashed

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commoners once spurned by nobles bear an increasing number of Waterdhavian titles—but only those commoners who amass enough wealth to buy these titles can achieve this status. During a key period of time, noble house after titled family fell upon hard times due to failed investments, increasing debts, and other calamities, and they each had hard decisions to make. As they saw it, their choices were selling off holdings or titles, or taking up a trade. Their goal was to gain coin enough to discharge all debts and retire elsewhere, such as in upland Tethyr or the hunting lodges of northern Sembia. Since many of them had no useful skills whatsoever beyond an ability to—badly—teach dancing or fencing or "high manners," selling lands and titles became their best option. A few retained their mansions and dwell in Waterdeep now as lonely recluses, skulking forth by night to buy provender in Dock Ward or to purchase a lone meal in South Ward.

Some of their replacements, the wealthy who've bought titles, are delighted—and somewhat able—to play the part of nobility. These new lords and ladies are every bit as eccentric, flamboyant, and haughty as their predecessors.

But others choose a different path—that of the so-called "wildblade."

The Ranker Privileges of Rank

Waterdeep of old had its rakes and wildblades back when seventy-six noble families graced the city, and each of them could name the other's blazons and knew the faces of the patriarchs and matriarchs of all noble houses. At any one time, six to nine disgraced young nobles were in trouble with the Watch or the ruling Masked Lords—or worse, shunned by or warned about by the senior nobility. These days, however, almost every buyer of a title who has children old enough to walk can bitterly identify at least one "wildblade" in his or her family.

Although some noble sons and daughters are sticklers for laws, rules, and the finer details of social hierarchy, others chafe at such "spalder-splash," to use one of the more polite Waterdhavian terms for nonsensical dross, and insist on being wildblades. These nobles are roistering rebels who break rules, outrage those who strive to be proper, and try to use their rank as justification (or excuse) for their behavior that earns commoners immediate arrest by the Watch, an uncomfortable night in a dungeon cell, and fines.

Unlike the former highborn nobility who had sense enough to "ride their dragons," or sow their wild oats in places decently distant from Waterdeep, nowadays roisterers play their pranks, run their swindles, and break the law "before all the sneering city," as one oft-repeated broadsheet line declared. The worst behavior is still rewarded with death, forfeiture of titles, and long imprisonment—but slightly less egregious behavior (such as breaking into a noble's mansion, attacking a noble in the streets, setting fire to a carriage full of nobility, and dashing buckets of slops or full chamber pots into the faces of all who try to flee from it) earns exile from the city. Sometimes the exile lasts for a decade, twelve summers, or twenty—and sometimes it lasts much longer than that.

Which is how the Wild Lords came to be.

Lordly Far from Home

Many exiled "new nobility" change their names and hide, sinking into new identities and obscurity in cities, towns, and backland hamlets far from Waterdeep. Others are too foolish to change their ways, and these latter nobles soon perish, end up in chains, or are tasked with digging graves or nightsoil. Others find their own grim niche as local tyrants, lording it over a guild, a town, a jail, or a warehouse.

And then you have the infamous Wild Lords, a notorious band—actually several rival bands—of marauding, lawless adventurers who style themselves lords and ladies and adopt the airs and rich garments of wealthy, civilized, and sophisticated nobles. Even as they enthusiastically try any sort of crime and debauchery, they cunningly hire (and frame) adventurers to perform the most public of their dirtiest work, seeking to have no punishment fall upon them. If these Wild Lords fail to plan ahead, they blame any adventurers who happen to be near when they raid a coach, burst into a mansion to despoil it, or horsewhip someone whose face they dislike.

For nearly forty summers now, the Sword Coast has known of the Wild Lords in tavern tales, gossip, and local Watch reports. Though the patience of some authorities has more than run out and several exiled wildblades have lost their lives as a result, a seemingly infinite trickle of new exiles replenishes the ranks of the Wild Lords.

So season after season, in their splendid half-cloaks and lace-throated doublets, decked out in their latest fashions and gleaming rapiers, the Wild Lords swagger and preen.

The Dark House

The oldest Wild Lords band has a dozen members led by Blakrho "Blackthroat" Phull, a darkly handsome son of Lord Mhairdren Phull. Phull originally purchased that surname and the lordship that went with it from the impoverished "founding Phulls." Barely had the newly ennobled family moved into the Phull mansion when Lord Mhairdren's second son

Blakrho stabbed his elder brother Haelrorn, accusing—with initial success—his younger brother Felmar of the murder. As Felmar heatedly argued his innocence in the cells of Castle Waterdeep, Blakhro found his grieving mother lost in drink and accosted her. When his furious father came upon his son acting out violently in this manner, Blakhro broke Lord Mhairdren's jaw with one blow and hurled him down the grand stair of his new mansion, breaking his sire's back, an arm, and a leg.

Before his exile could be proclaimed, Blakrho fled Waterdeep with most of his father's coins, the best horses, and a coach full of wine from the cellars. Several creditors sent sellswords after "the Blackthroat" to collect what they were owed "in coin or blood," but only two of those sellswords survived long enough to inform him of his exile.

After that, the Blackthroat descended on rural upland Amn, posing as a traveling noble happy to overpay for a good night's lodging. He slew host after host, farmers and lordlings alike, and sold their livestock to passing drovers. Then he departed Amn before justice could catch up with him, bought a moribund roadside inn on the Coast Way, and wintered there in style. During that winter, he sold off the wines and gewgaws of the slain lordlings, and the furniture and foodstuffs of the farmers even as he extended a warm welcome to other outcast Waterdhavian nobles.

Most male exiles spent a pleasant tenday or two and moved on, but Blakrho persuaded no less than six wildblade women cast out of Waterdeep (most of them condemned for murdering kin or servants) to remain with him that winter. Using all his charm, he convinced the females to form a "dark noble house" with him, turning any hatreds and rivalries for each other that might arise into anger at outsiders, not "fellow wild ones." In the spring, he and his band set off on a lawless "wander" down the coast of Amn and then Tethyr that has lasted now for some forty summers. It has been one long string of murders, thefts, swindles, and bold pranks. His career is embellished in tavern retellings, but enough dark truth remains to earn Blakrho a dozen deaths or more. Yet somehow (he's practiced at both disguises and misdirection) he has eluded capture.

Those who've met him say the Blackthroat looks as young, agile, and handsome as ever, and rumors have begun to spread that a fell magic (probably true)—or even vampirism (probably false)—is keeping him young. The females who continue to ride and roister with him are aging visibly, though newer recruits have joined his "dark house" and continue to do so in numbers sufficient to swell and not merely replenish their ranks. Most of the lords and ladies of the Dark House are skilled with swords and acrobatic roguery, and a few are sorcerers of some accomplishment—and all share a loving loyalty to the Blackthroat and to each other.

New Rivals

Over the years, other bands of Wild Lords have rivaled the Blackthroat in notoriety, but they each end up being imprisoned and executed, or they vanish forever. These have included Relavvar "Redblade" Husteem, who is said to have been tirelessly hunted down and killed by agents hired by the ruling Masked Lords of Waterdeep. Another was "Firehurler" Felgrar Ilitul and his band. Ilitul was an enthusiastic arsonist who liked to indulge in murder and pillaging in a home before setting the residence alight. None know what happened to him and his group, though rumors tell of a run-in with the Blackthroat that left unidentifiable remains in Blackthroat's wake.

Tales of the dark fate of some Wild Lords have led newer groups to fare far and wide across Faerûn, so that they can now be encountered anywhere. In recent summers, challengers for the Blackthroat's infamy have arisen out of Waterdeep—notably the duo of Helgramgura Gundwynd and her fast friend, Velmark Durinbold. These two have been dubbed "Helvel" by minstrels singing droll songs of their seductions, bold robberies, and penchant for murdering wizards and seizing their magic items. Some claim that the two exiles can't cast spells, and so they have decided to make the world safer for themselves by killing everyone who can use magic, then seizing any magic items they can themselves wield. Helvel is now rumored to be pursuing an aim that the Redblade and earlier exiles held dear: the hiring of assassins skillful enough to go to Waterdeep and successfully—and spectacularly—end the lives of those who pronounced exile on them.

As for the recent doings of the Blackthroat? He has been heard to speak longingly of riding into Waterdeep to regain his "rightful" lordship and enjoy a luxurious retirement restored to the Phull family mansion. "I lived there less than a tenday and miss the place more and more," he has reportedly said. "Why should I not be accepted? The only misdeeds that can be proven against my name—my *titled* name—befell far from Waterdeep. And after all, everyone knows that what happens in the uncouth outlands has never mattered in the City of Splendors."

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers . . .

Masquerades

By Robert J. Schwalb ✦ Illustration by Bernadette Carstensen

It's party time!

How do your players react when you tell them their characters have been invited to the gala masked ball?

For some, a party serves as an opportunity to flex roleplaying muscles, a chance to engage in intrigue, and an opportunity to really bring out the personality of one's character. Not everyone is so enthusiastic when it comes to these events, however. A party can be a chore to these players—an awkward and doomed enterprise that rarely pays dividends when all is said and done. The scenario involves too many characters and too many directions. What's worse is that the whole situation can fall apart with one wrong move.

Whatever your opinion might be about party sequences, you can't deny their place in the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. Going back to 1st Edition, "The Feast at Dame Gold's" in *Scourge of the Slavelords* saw the heroes rubbing elbows with Safeton's most important citizens. Some time after that, David Noonan used a masquerade as a backdrop for hunting the vampire in the 3rd Edition Eberron® adventure, *Whispers of the Vampire's Blade*.

Several factors make these encounters difficult. Managing several characters at the same time is never easy. You compound this situation with the roleplaying demands the scene places on both you and the players. Finally, unless the group has a clear and attainable objective, you're not likely to bring the scenario to a satisfactory conclusion. Mitigating these complications, then, is what this article is all about. Even if you never plan to run a masquerade encounter in your campaign, the advice and guidance here is applicable to nearly any kind of big event, from banquets and audiences with important characters to any social event you can imagine.

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Preparation

A social event featuring several characters demands a bit more preparation than does a standard encounter.

Objective

A roleplaying encounter should serve the larger story, either by resolving a complication and thus wrapping up the adventure's story or by creating a complication that can kick off an adventure or draw the characters deeper into the plot. Given the complexities of a masquerade, you should establish right away what purpose this encounter serves. Maybe the characters are searching for the vampire in the room, perhaps they are trying to foil a plot to poison the duke, or they are searching for cultists hidden among the nobility. Whatever you decide, write it down. Every decision you make from here on should play to this objective.

EXAMPLE OBJECTIVE

Since I like the whole cultist angle, I've decided that a cult of Glasya has infiltrated the duke's court. The cultists intend to remove his advisors and elevate themselves into influential positions. To achieve this power shift, they need to remove the duke's key advisor, the vizier Guy Entrean. To this end, they plan to poison the duke's son and make the vizier take the fall for it. And, they intend to do all this at the duke's masquerade.

The adventurers' objective, then, is to sniff out the cultists, foil the assassination, and unmask the ringleaders.

Once you settle on the objective, communicate it to the players clearly. This task might be as simple (and inelegant) as stating it in plain English. A better option is to have the players discover the objective through their own efforts based on the outcomes from previous encounters. For example, the adventurers might discover earlier in the adventure that the vampire they were tracking disappeared inside the duke's castle. Or, they might have interrogated a cultist and learned that the master holds a position in the king's court.

Fixing the objective in the players' minds helps focus their efforts to reach the encounter end and not get lost in the conversation and red herrings you might throw at them. No amount of focus, however, will get them to the encounter's end if you don't help them along the way. Be prepared to drop hints and put the right characters in their path to make certain they find the information they need to get in, have fun, and get out.

End

Attaining the encounter's objective is also the encounter's climax. Once you're there, wrap up the scene quickly and move toward the next plot point. As with any encounter, you could have three basic outcomes.

A successful encounter means the adventurers learn the information or reach the plot point needed to propel the story forward.

A failed encounter means the adventurers did not obtain the needed information and must find another way to discover it. Be sure to have something ready in case this occurs. Usually a combat encounter is a good choice. Perhaps the cultists discover the adventurers at the party and flee, only to strike the group later in the adventure. Or, maybe the assassin poisons the duke, and now the adventurers have to track him or her down.

The third outcome is abandonment. The adventurers flee, give up, or seek an option not covered by the encounter. As for failure, have something prepared in case circumstances shift and draw the adventurers away from the encounter.

EXAMPLE END

In setting up the encounter, I settle on three possible endings.

Success: The heroes find a cultist, protect the duke's son, and reveal the ringleader (the high priest) before the entire court.

Failure: The duke's son is poisoned, and the vizier is disgraced. The duke elevates his nephew (who has ties to the cult) to take his place. The vizier might be sent to the executioner, and if the adventurers want a chance to block further plots by the cult of Glasya, they need to rescue this character, which leads to a combat encounter or another skill challenge.

Abandoned: If the adventurers abandon the masquerade by not attending, I'll rope them into the plot by sending cultists to destroy the adventurers. Perhaps the cult's leader believes that the adventurers could be called upon to investigate the death of the duke's son. Since it has its own "band of adventurers" in place now, it seeks to minimize the chance of the adventurers being called up and maximize the chance that its friendly group of adventurers will be brought on board instead. A captured cultist can hint at the murderous plan and gloat that it is too late to save the boy. However, the prisoner can be the proof the heroes need to implicate certain high-ranking cultists in the plot.

The Characters

A masquerade involves dozens of people, and it can include all kinds of races, motivations, occupations, and so on. A normal roleplaying encounter can be difficult with one or two characters, so a room filled with characters can be daunting. To help you manage the characters here, let's put the characters into three discrete groups: principal characters, incidental characters, and set dressing.

Example Ally: Amanda Fairheart

Lady Amanda Fairheart is the duke's secret mistress. She's an attractive human female on middle age's doorstep, with long red hair, blue eyes, and a fine figure. People whisper about her associations with the duke, but so far they have no hard evidence of their tryst. Charming and intelligent, Amanda has used her talents to position herself high in the court and hears gossip about the happenings and intrigues. She genuinely loves the duke, though his stubbornness frustrates her. Amanda is reserved and keeps her lover's secret, though she watches her peers closely.

Lady Fairheart suspects many courtiers have been drawn into a secret society: a deviant social group that focuses on hedonistic excess and debauchery. She's certain that Father Frothby, the high priest of Erathis, is involved, as are a number of lesser courtiers. She spends the night watching the guests and working to deduce which ones might be affiliated with the subversive elements.

Fairheart wears an owl mask.

Principal Characters

The principal characters are those crucial to the encounter's objective. From them, the adventurers face complications and gain insights. As a result, these characters are the ones on which you should focus the most time.

You should aim for six principal characters plus one for each adventurer above five. Each principal should represent one of the following six roles. Extra characters you create can duplicate roles already covered by other characters.

The Ally

An ally is sympathetic to the adventurers' cause and helps them achieve the encounter's objective. Methods for assistance include having training in a skill the adventurers don't have, aiding on skill checks when possible, or supplying a clue needed to resolve the encounter.

The Enemy

The encounter's main antagonist is the enemy. This character is tied directly to the encounter's objective and sets in motion the consequences for failure. Enemy implies a character opposed to the adventurers, and in most cases he or she will be actively engaged in challenging the heroes. However, an enemy also might be someone the adventurers have to convince, befriend, or otherwise coerce to achieve the encounter's objective. In the end, the enemy's function is to thwart the adventurers' efforts.

The Obstacle

The obstacle interferes with the adventurers' progress toward completing the encounter and must be overcome before the adventurer can deal with the enemy. An obstacle can be a distraction, a red herring, or an instigator who complicates the plot. This character might be an ally to the enemy or could be an unwitting accomplice.

Example Enemy: Father Frothby

The city-state's most influential religious figure is also a ranking member of the cult of Glasya. He maintains his position in the Erathis temple through deception and subterfuge, resorting to murder to keep his secret safe. Frothby is a paunchy human male in his late fifties, with heavy jowls and thinning hair. He is rarely seen without the vestments of his office, gaudy blue robes embroidered with silver thread.

Frothby is a gifted orator, possessed of great wit and character. He makes friends easily, and people feel comfortable enough to confide in him. He has used his gifts to spread the cult's influence throughout the ducal court as a way to further his ambitions for the throne.

Lady Fairheart's inquiries have captured his attention, and he intends to destroy her this very night by shaming her in public. He will spread false rumors about Fairheart's tryst with the vizier, Guy Entrean. He believes that if he propagates this lie, he can turn the duke against his mistress. The high priest is not willing to expose or weaken the duke at this time, since he needs the duke to elevate other cultists to powerful positions. With the court distracted, Frothby can poison the duke's son and set the coup in motion.

Frothby wears a horse mask.

EXAMPLE OBSTACLE: GUY ENTREAN

Guy Entrean is the duke's vizier and the man closest to the ducal family. He is critical to saving the boy's life, since the adventurers must go through him to protect the child. The vizier doesn't trust the heroes and suspects they are up to no good. Entrean holds adventurers in low esteem, seeing them as meddlers and mavericks who abide by no laws and ultimately cause more problems than they solve.

A human male in his mid-sixties, Entrean has served as vizier for both the current duke and for his father and has led an unimpeachable career, offering wisdom and guidance throughout his time in the ducal court. He is fiercely protective of his charges and believes he keeps them secure. Any remark that suggests he has failed in his responsibility angers him to the point that he won't listen to reason.

Only with extreme reluctance did the vizier allow the adventurers to attend the masquerade. Guy is utterly unhelpful, moving to interrupt conversations with important guests, and he monitors the adventurers' movements throughout the night.

Guy knows about the duke's affair with Amanda Fairheart and, though he is not happy about the tryst, he keeps the secret to protect his master.

Entrean wears a rat mask.

EXAMPLE CONTROL: CAPTAIN EDWARD ROTHSCHILDE

Edward Rothschilde has served the duke as guard captain for a few years, and he gained his post through his cousin's romance with the noble. Edward and Amanda Fairheart have a strained relationship, largely borne of her efforts to raise him up; he would rather have earned his post through merit instead of nepotism. He is unaware of his cousin's affair with the duke, and he would be horrified to learn of it.

Edward is a slim human male in his mid-twenties with shoulder-length blond hair, his cousin's blue eyes, and pleasant features. He wears chainmail most of the time and keeps his family longsword in a scabbard on his belt.

Security is Edward's first concern, and he and his guards staff the exits to prevent drunken revelers from wandering throughout the keep. Edward is also watchful for troublemakers. He steps in to defuse arguments and scuffles, using a glare and a polite threat to keep the guests in line.

If the adventurers move to rough up anyone, Edward is a step away to settle the dispute. He ejects problematic guests and might use force to subdue an unruly reveler.

Edward has heard the rumors about the secret society and knows of at least two members: Lysa Vreen and Samuel Redder, both of whom are lesser courtiers who have little influence at court. Edward believes the society is a harmless, if distasteful, distraction.

Edward wears no mask.

The Control

If the adventurers stray off course, the control character can nudge them back in the proper direction. Control characters can restrict the adventurers' movements by confining them to the encounter area, plus they can defuse tense arguments and thus prevent the encounter from devolving into a fight. Consider having the control character provide other safeguards to ensure that the social event unfolds as you intend. A control character should not, however, be used to "railroad" the adventurers. Rather, use the character to challenge the heroes when they try to move beyond the event's parameters.

The Informant

The informant is a person of note who has crucial information that can help the adventurers reach their objective. The informant is hidden in the encounter and must be revealed through the adventurers' efforts. Even then, the adventurers might have to pressure the character to reveal what he or she knows.

The Wild Card

The wild card provides the unpredictability and chaos needed to create an interesting complication during the encounter. A wild card can come into play as a result of a red herring, or it might step in as a reaction to the adventurers' efforts. The complication might be related to the objective, but even if it isn't, it delays progress or makes achieving the goal more difficult.

EXAMPLE INFORMANT: LYSA VREEN

Lysa Vreen is a middling noble who is embroiled in the cult. She's a young woman, just eighteen, with long black hair and a pleasant look about her. She's also impressionable and naive, the traits that landed her in her present predicament. She hates the cult and wants out, but fear keeps her in line. She knows Father Frothby leads the cult and knows he carries poison in the ring on his pinky finger. She does not know whom he intends to poison.

Fear keeps Lysa in line. She hasn't come forward because she's terrified of the repercussions a betrayal would entail. The bruises on her body have yet to heal from the last time she disobeyed the high priest.

Lysa confesses her part in the cult, provided the adventurers give her assurances of safety from both the cult and the duke.

Lysa wears a rabbit mask.

Incidental Characters

In addition to the principal characters, the adventurers can converse with many other revelers and guests. Creating dozens of characters is both impractical and a waste of your energy. You have your hands full with the principal characters. Instead, use the following tables to whip up an interesting incidental character on the fly. Just roll a d20 three times and consult each table for the character in question. You might do this ahead of time so that you can have a few ready in a pinch. As the event unfolds, these incidental characters might acquire additional traits and names, based on conversations the adventurers have with them. Such developments make great hooks for future encounters and adventures.

EXAMPLE WILD CARD: THE DUKE

The duke has not ruled the city-state for long—his father took a long time dying. He spent much of his adulthood indulging his own interests: hunting, drinking, seduction, and more drinking. When he came to power, he limited his distractions and turned his attention toward becoming the able ruler his father was. The only thing he has yet to do is end his secret affair. Guilt creates tension between himself and his affectionate wife, and he has recently sent her off to a foreign court for safekeeping until he can figure out how to extricate himself from his own troubles.

The duke is large man, with a bushy beard, long blond hair, and ruddy features. He can be boisterous, or he might grow quiet and withdrawn, often shifting from one mood to another with little warning.

If the adventurers speak to Amanda Fairheart more than once, he grows nervous and confronts them. He then demands they display their talents in a mock duel, pitting one adventurer against the duke's champion (use a "monster" of around the adventurer's level, such as a human noble or a human swordsman). If the adventurers refuse, the duke grows angry and creates a scene that the adventurers must settle quickly. If they don't, they might discover that the other guests are unwilling to engage them in conversation.

The duke wears a lion mask.

If you require further detail, roll for a random mannerism and quirk on the tables provided in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 186.

Mask (Personality)

The result of one d20 roll determines what sort of mask the character wears. If you're using another social gathering as the backdrop, you can use this table to assign personality traits (as noted in the table) as well as broad physical characteristics to the character. A monkey, for example, might be a particularly hairy individual, and a rat could be shifty and slight. A mask can also indicate race. Dragon would be dragonborn; dog or wolf could be a shifter.

d20	Mask (Personality)
1	Dragon (regal, greedy)
2	Devil/fiend (sinister, offensive)
3	Goblin/orc/gnoll (crude, unmannered)
4	Lion/tiger/cat (noble, just)
5	Horse/mule/donkey (stubborn, persistent)
6	Dog/wolf (loyal, friendly)
7	Rat/mouse (sneaky, dodgy)
8	Rabbit (timid, frightened)
9	Hawk/eagle/owl (predatory, perceptive)
10	Laughing/crying (boisterous/somber)
11	Grinning/frowning (exuberant/critical)
12	Sylvan/elf (ethereal, whimsical)
13	Insect (calculating, unnerving)
14	Bear (bold, assertive)
15	Fish (clammy, uncomfortable)
16	Cow/bull (slow, aggressive)
17	Pig/boar (slovenly, angry)
18	Raven/vulture (disturbing, thieving)
19	Monkey/ape (tricky, comical)
20	Exotic/strange (insane, bizarre)

EXAMPLE INCIDENTAL CHARACTER

Before running the encounter, I create a few incidental characters. Since I have time, I also roll for mannerisms and quirks. The first number refers to the mask (personality) result, the second is the first meeting result, and the third indicates which motive I rolled. The two numbers after that refer to the NPC Mannerisms and NPC Quirks tables on page 186 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Fuming Guest: A dragon-masked (1) guest insults (4) the first adventurer he meets because he's angry (1) about a slight made by a rival. He whispers (7) the insult and then hobbles away (18).

Grotesque Drunkard: A guest in a laughing (10) mask pushes an adventurer aside (9) in her confused drunkenness (16). Her mask falls away, and she squints at the adventurer (14) for a moment, revealing a face that was better when it was hidden (20).

Trouble Maker: Another guest in a half-bear (14) mask clears his throat (6) after the adventurer ends a conversation with another character. The troublemaker (18), in a slurring voice (4) from a mouth lacking many teeth (7), suggests another guest has been saying crude things about the character.

Well-Dressed Woman: A woman wearing a wolf (6) mask comes forward laughing (13) about a jest. She pauses to fix the adventurer with an appraising eye (4), chews her lip (16), and smooths her fine dress (4). Let the seduction begin.

Questing Knight: A man in a frowning (11) mask sticks his hand out for a firm handshake (11). He queries the character about events in a nearby community (14), tapping his fingers all the while (18). His hands are strangely scarred and hideous (6).

First Meeting

The first meeting describes the character's initial encounter with the adventurer and can reveal a tendency toward a particular behavior or action.

d20	First Meeting
1	Invades personal space
2	Attacks
3	Faints
4	Insults
5	Wipes nose
6	Clears throat
7	Boasts
8	Winces
9	Acts pushy
10	Has a limp handshake
11	Has a firm handshake
12	Embraces
13	Laughs
14	Scorns
15	Questions
16	Coughs or sneezes
17	Has flatulence
18	Mops brow
19	Weeps or sobs
20	Is inexplicable

Motive

Even incidental characters have motives. The result tells you what prompts a character to engage the adventurer in the first place.

d20	Motive
1	Anger
2	Envy
3	Lust
4	Greed
5	Self-aggrandizement
6	Mistaken identity
7	Religion
8	Debate
9	Gossip
10	Boredom
11	Curiosity
12	Recognition
13	Friendship
14	Knowledge
15	Love
16	Confusion or distress
17	Assistance
18	Troublemaking
19	Consolation
20	Deviance

Set Dressing

Aside from the principal and incidental characters, guards, servants, cooks, and other guests mill about, adding to the noise and atmosphere. These people are unimportant to the encounter and serve as a backdrop for the encounter to unfold. You can mention them in passing, but you might want to have the tables above handy in case a player confronts one of these characters. What was once a piece of set dressing might become an interesting incidental character.

Structure

Once you have all the components in place, your final step is to give the encounter structure.

Roleplaying

In a pure roleplaying encounter, the adventurers discover the information they need by asking the right questions, putting the clues together, and making deductions from the gathered evidence. If you're inclined to go this route, consider the following tips.

Timing: You decide when information is gained and what the quality of that information is, based on the interactions. You need to make the players work for their results without making the encounter frustrating. Write down the facts each principal knows and consider the kinds of things an adventurer would have to say or do to make the character to reveal these facts. The adventurers might engage the character several times during the encounter as new facts emerge and make themselves clear.

ROLEPLAY EXAMPLE

I've opted to run the masquerade as a roleplaying encounter, so I'll start work with Amanda Fairheart. From my brief description, this character provides them with the following basic facts.

1. She suspects that many courtiers are members of a hedonistic secret society.

2. She further believes that Father Frothby is somehow involved.

3. She does not deny that she is the duke's secret mistress.

4. Lady Fairheart is concerned about Lysa. Lysa seems to be afraid of Father Frothby for some reason.

Fairheart is an ally, so she seeks out the adventurers to gain their help. However, I don't want to give away the information all at once, so I need to set some criteria for revealing this information.

To learn #1, the adventurers must convince her that they have the duke's best interests in mind.

For #2, the adventurers must bring up Frothby as a potential cultist.

To gain #3, the adventurers must have gained #1 and they must also have proof of some sort that she has had a tryst with the duke. She avoids answering the question, though, and this becomes obvious if the player roleplays well or if the player succeeds in a relevant skill check. She is an honest person, so she will not lie outright, but she will do her best to turn the conversation to other matters.

As for #4, that depends on whether the adventurers know #1 and #2.

Skill Checks: A pure roleplaying scenario can be a lot of fun, but it can also be tedious, especially for players not overly inclined toward this play style. If the encounter drags or your players seem reluctant to roleplay extensively, you can ask for skill checks to augment or replace roleplaying. For most principal characters, set the DCs at moderate difficulty. For enemies, use hard DCs, and you can use easy DCs for allies. Skills should be interaction skills such as Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight, and Intimidate. Do not, however, let the entire encounter collapse into a few die rolls.

Rewards: Every encounter should provide a reward, and a social event is no different. If the players handle this event through roleplaying alone, be sure to provide an experience reward when they succeed. The objective should be weighted as a major quest of the party's level.

Skill Challenge

A skill challenge can appear to be an obvious solution to running a masquerade. Relying too much on a skill challenge structure can mechanize what would otherwise be an interesting roleplaying opportunity. To help make the skill challenge feel more organic, consider the following tips.

Multiple Challenges: You might be tempted to break up the skill challenge into several smaller skill challenges, assigning one to each principal character. There's nothing wrong with this approach, but you must set up success and failure consequences for each one. A success can reveal the facts that a character knows. You might also parcel out this information as the adventurers gain successes during the challenges. Failure might require repeating part of the skill challenge, locating another character who has the same knowledge, or having the adventurers face another

SAMPLE STAGE: LADY AMANDA FAIRHEART

A beautiful woman in a stunning blue dress stands to one side, ignoring the other partygoers and sipping at her drink. Could she know something about the hidden cultists?

The adventurers can talk with Lady Fairheart to learn more about the hidden cultists. The adventurers can earn a maximum of four successes by talking to this character.

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Insight, Intimidate, Streetwise.

Bluff (hard DC, maximum 3 successes): The character approaches the lady under false pretenses.

Diplomacy (easy DC, maximum 3 successes): The character genuinely tries to earn the lady's trust.

Insight (moderate DC, maximum 1 success): The character tries to ascertain the lady's mood. A success here also reveals that she watches both Father Frothby and the duke.

Intimidate (moderate DC, maximum 3 successes): The character tries to threaten the lady. If the character mentions her involvement with the duke (which might have been picked up through a different skill challenge or series of roleplaying encounters), he or she gains a +2 bonus to the check.

Streetwise (hard DC, maximum 1 success): The character recalls a rumor overheard about the lady and the duke being especially close. (This could have been learned from an earlier interaction at the party.)

Secondary Skills: History, special.

History (moderate DC): The character recalls a great deed the duke performed. A success earns the character a +2 bonus to his or her next Diplomacy check, or it removes 1 failure gained during this skill challenge. This skill can be used only once to remove a failure.

Special: If one or more adventurers have already spoken with the duke or Father Frothby, the adventurer gains a +2 bonus to all skill checks related to this stage. The reason this could come about: Lady Fairheart has observed the adventurer (or adventurers) speaking to the duke or Father Frothby, and something she saw in the discussion relates directly to the adventurer's skill check attempt. (Example: If the adventurer uses Intimidate, the lady might be fearful that the duke let something slip about their affair.)

Success: The first success gained reveals that Lady Fairheart suspects many courtiers are members of a hedonistic secret society. The second success reveals that the Lady believes Father Frothby is somehow involved. The third success catches Lady Fairheart off guard in some manner—she is an honest woman and she does not overtly deny being the duke's secret mistress. The fourth success reveals that Lysa might be involved in the cult (or Father Frothby) in some manner.

Failure: A failure in a specific skill closes off the use of that skill for that adventurer.

condition to achieve the information from the character. If you opt for this approach, keep the complexity low and be sure to vary the skills to allow different characters to participate.

One Challenge: You might run the entire masquerade as a single complexity 4 or 5 skill challenge. In this case, divide the possible successes among the various characters while making sure that each adventurer has a way to contribute. As with multiple challenges, you need to incorporate a wide range of skills to ensure that everyone can participate. In addition, the higher the complexity, the greater the likelihood that the adventurers will fail. To combat this reality, you should have ways to remove failures, either involving skill checks or the performance of certain actions during the challenge.

Roleplaying: Although the skill challenge approach suggests that the players will be making skill checks to get the information they need, there's no reason to ignore roleplaying opportunities. A player who gets into character and plays the part could gain a bonus to a skill check or might earn a success outright. By blending both roleplaying and mechanical techniques, you are certain to appeal to nearly every kind of player.

Final Note: Know Your Audience

The most important thing to keep in mind is your audience. Many DMs have grand ideas about running interesting and complex roleplaying scenes that are ultimately wasted on a disengaged group of players. No matter how much fun you think the party sequence will be, if your players come to the table to kick down doors and kill monsters, you'll have an easier time knocking down a brick wall with a toothpick.

Several player types are eminently suited to the social event. Actors, explorers, storytellers, and thinkers all do well in these environments. For an actor, it's a chance to take the spotlight and enjoy his or her character's personality. Explorers have a chance to ferret out the information they're after. Storytellers should appreciate the added depth to the campaign's narrative as well as seeing the individual characters come to life. Finally, thinkers can put their talents to use, collecting the information from allies and putting pieces together to form a more complete picture.

Instigators, power gamers, slayers, and watchers are hard to please with these encounters. Instigators have a penchant for causing trouble and could potentially unravel the entire scene. With roleplaying as the primary vehicle, power gamers and slayers will become bored quickly. Finally, watchers probably won't participate in the roleplaying sequences and might grow uncomfortable if thrust into the spotlight.

Having a slayer or a power gamer in your group doesn't mean you shouldn't try your hand at a masquerade. Give these players something to do by offering them a way to contribute without forcing them into a situation with which they aren't comfortable. The following entries describe ways you can engage these characters during a masquerade.

Instigator: The instigator likes to cause trouble, so the trick is to indulge this player without destroying the entire encounter. Escalation is one option. Confront the player with a guest at the party that is more reckless and disruptive than the instigator. It becomes this player's responsibility to manage that guest so the party can reach its objective.

Another option is controlled chaos. Provide opportunities for the instigator to cause trouble for a character not directly involved in the social event. Two men might vie for the affections of a woman. The instigator could set them against each other or sweep in and charm the woman. Tempers could flare and create a scene that gives the other characters a chance to gain critical information.

Power Gamer: Give this player a carrot. Make the encounter's payoff something important to this character, maybe in the form of grandmaster training or a magic item the player wants. If there's a good prize at the end, the player will become invested in the scene even if his or her character is not optimized for the encounter.

Slayer: A slayer thrives on combat, so make sure you give the player the opportunity to swing his or her sword or fire off a spell. This situation can best be handled by a duel between the adventurer and a character. An insult is probably all it takes to start the duel. The resulting combat might be limited to "first bloodied" or "to unconsciousness." While that adventurer is engaged, the other adventurers have the chance to mine characters for information.

Watcher: A watcher is the trickiest player to make happy with this encounter. Roleplaying is not this player's forte, and so the player might grow bored quickly if the action doesn't pick up soon. Try giving the watcher things to do in the game by setting up situations where the watcher can gather information without directly engaging any characters. The watcher might accompany an actor and make Insight checks to gauge reactions. Or, the watcher might follow a suspicious character to keep track of his or her dealings through the encounter. Be descriptive when relaying information, and play up the characters' idiosyncrasies to make the encounter memorable.

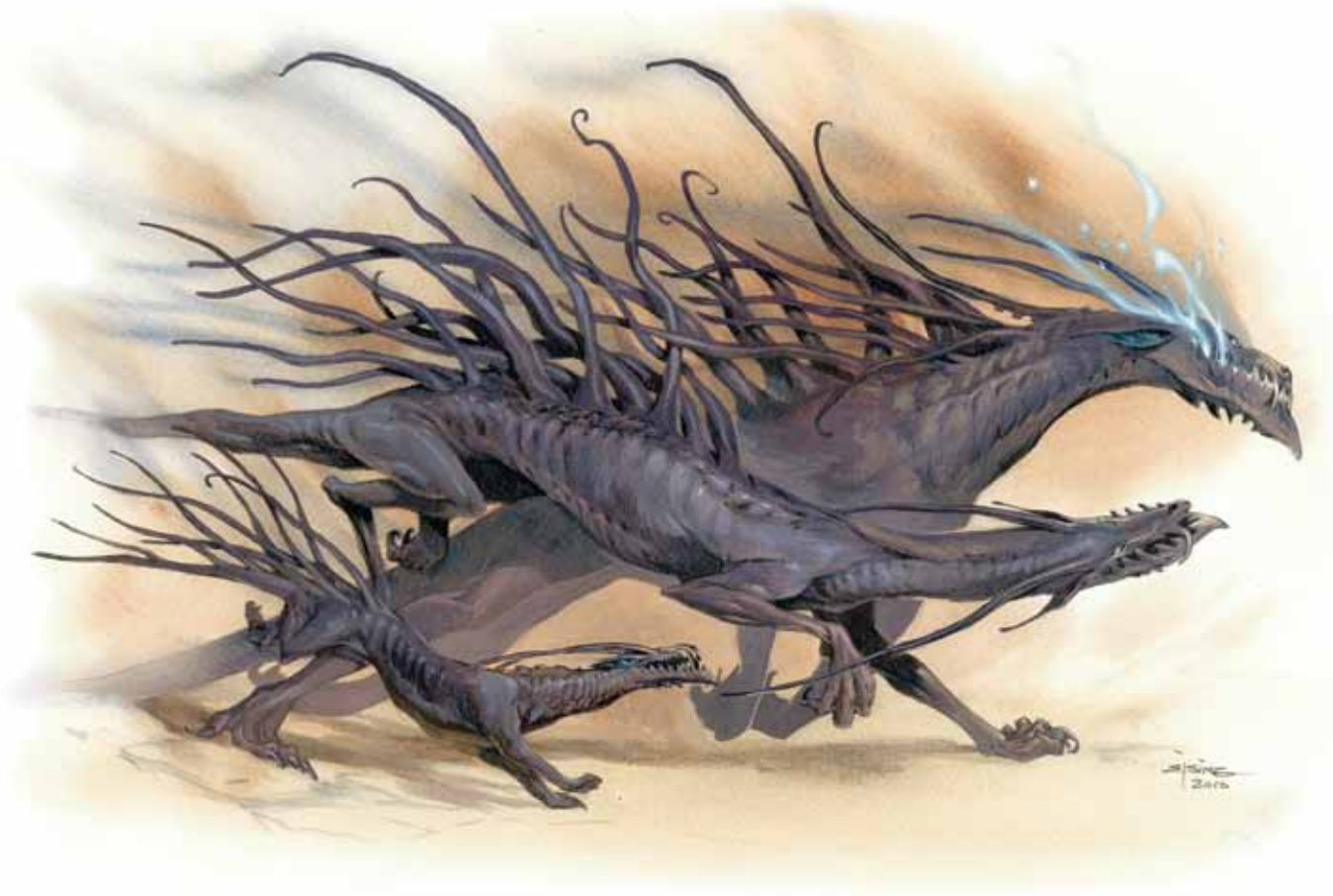
About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed over one hundred roleplaying game titles for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, and the *Star Wars* roleplaying game. Some of his most recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Monster Manual® 3*, *Player's Handbook® 3*, and *Martial Power™ 2* and also in the pages of both *Dragon®* and *Dungeon®* magazines. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Bestiary:

Lightdrinkers

By Andy Clautice ✦ Illustration by Jesper Ejsing



Predatory creatures that feed on light, lightdrinkers roam Gloomwrought like feral dogs. From the darkness, they attack anything else they find, for light isn't enough to slake their hunger.

Night in Gloomwrought falls darker than anywhere in the mortal realm. The lamps lining the city's main streets can do only so much against the gloom. Someone watching the Avenue of Chains from a window might see the lanterns wink out, one by one, as darkness creeps slowly down the street like a tide rolling in. At the edge of each pool of light, just before it goes out, a shadow passes over the ground, perhaps betraying the hint of a paw or a snout.

Beasts of the Nighttime: Lightdrinkers roam the streets at night, patrolling their territory and scooping up whatever food they can find–whether a lost animal or the light of a lonely lamppost. As they make their way around the city each night, Gloomwrought darkens further, until only a few stubborn stars light the City of Midnight. Those who do their work in the wee hours must learn to cope with a distinct lack of visibility–which is exactly the reason many of them choose the middle of the night.

Pets of the Cabal: Lightdrinkers of all types can be trained to work with people, and their natural talents are in high demand. The Tenebrous Cabal first domesticated the creatures, using them to wink out the lights near a target's home to either cover the cabal's entrance or cloak a victim in darkness before carrying out a kidnapping or assassination. Through its work with lightdrinkers, the cabal further developed its knowledge of shadow magic.

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Hunting Lightdrinker **Level 9 Soldier**
Medium shadow beast XP 400

HP 95; **Bloodied** 47 **Initiative** +11
AC 25, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21 **Perception** +7
Speed 7 Darkvision
Resist 10 radiant

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage.

⸸ **Dark Fangs** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the lightdrinker's next turn.
Effect: The target's space fills with darkness until the end of the lightdrinker's next turn. For creatures without darkvision, the area blocks line of sight and is totally obscured. Creatures without darkvision are blinded while in the area. Light sources do not function in the darkness.

Triggered Actions

Dark Harrier (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to and marked by the lightdrinker moves to a square that is not adjacent to the lightdrinker.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The lightdrinker teleports up to 10 squares to a square adjacent to the triggering enemy, then uses *bite* against it.

✧ **Light Burst** (radiant) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The lightdrinker drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 6 radiant damage, and the target is blinded until the end of its next turn.

Skills Athletics +11, Stealth +14
Str 15 (+6) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 2 (+0) **Cha** 6 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Nightmaw Lightdrinker **Level 12 Skirmisher**
Large shadow beast (mount) XP 700

HP 121; **Bloodied** 60 **Initiative** +14
AC 26, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 23 **Perception** +9
Speed 7 Darkvision
Resist 10 radiant

Traits

Mounted Teleport (mount)
When the lightdrinker teleports, its rider teleports with it.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage.

⸸ **Night's Maw** (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The lightdrinker teleports up to 7 squares before the attack.
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage.
Effect: The target's space fills with darkness until the end of the lightdrinker's next turn. For creatures without darkvision, the area blocks line of sight and is totally obscured. Creatures without darkvision are blinded while in the area. Light sources do not function in the darkness.

Triggered Actions

Blood Frenzy ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The lightdrinker is first bloodied.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The lightdrinker uses *night's maw* twice.

✧ **Light Burst** (radiant) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The lightdrinker drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +15 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 9 radiant damage, and the target is blinded until the end of its next turn.

Skills Athletics +15, Stealth +17
Str 19 (+10) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 17 (+9)
Con 17 (+9) **Int** 2 (+2) **Cha** 6 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Starspawned Lightdrinker **Level 17 Brute**
Large shadow beast XP 1,600

HP 200; **Bloodied** 100 **Initiative** +11
AC 29, **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 29 **Perception** +13
Speed 6 Darkvision
Resist 10 radiant

Traits

Grounding Opportunist
If the lightdrinker hits with an opportunity attack, the target also falls prone.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Bite** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +22 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 7 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

✧ **Inhale Light** ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +20 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d12 + 13 damage, and the lightdrinker pulls the target up to 4 squares.
Effect: The target's space fills with darkness until the end of the lightdrinker's next turn. For creatures without darkvision, the area blocks line of sight and is totally obscured. Creatures without darkvision are blinded while in the area. Light sources do not function in the darkness.

Triggered Actions

✧ **Light Burst** (radiant) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The lightdrinker drops to 0 hit points.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +20 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 13 radiant damage, and the target is blinded until the end of its next turn.

Skills Athletics +20, Stealth +16
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 17 (+11) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 20 (+13) **Int** 2 (+4) **Cha** 6 (+6)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

About the Author

Andy Clautice has been designing games for over 15 years, but only recently for public consumption. He currently lives in Denver, toiling to bring the latest and greatest to your computer screen.

HEROIC
1–10

CHAOS SCAR™

Pit of Delirium

A Chaos Scar adventure for characters of levels 8–10

By Jeff Morgenroth

Illustration by Lorraine Schleter and Crazyred ✦ Cartography by Jason A. Engle

Introduction

A neogi slaver has learned how to harness the psychic energy trapped inside a fragment of the meteor that formed the Chaos Scar and is using it to enslave the inhabitants of nearby Restwell Keep. The adventurers will need all their wits, muscle, and insight to survive with their lives (and sanity) intact.

"Pit of Delirium" is a Dungeons & Dragons® Chaos Scar adventure for characters of levels 8–10. The maps for this adventure were constructed using tiles from *Dungeon Tiles Master Set: The Dungeon*. Neogi and meenlocks are described in *Monster Manual*® 2 and *Monster Manual*® 3 respectively, but neither resource is needed to run this adventure.

This adventure draws on source material presented in "Keep on the Chaos Scar" (*Dungeon* 176) by Mike Mearls. Feel free to change the names of places and personalities to suit your own campaign.

Adventure Background

Yalax the neogi had a run-in with some illithids in the Underdark and was driven to the surface on pain of death. Staggering from defeat and lusting for revenge, the crafty neogi sought a means to gain the advantage against his subterranean enemies and return to his demesne. Yalax found his way to the shattered caves beneath the Chaos Scar and, after months of brooding and exploring, unearthed a fragment of the meteor that crashed into the Nentir Vale and birthed the Chaos Scar. Yalax learned that he could manipulate the fragment's psychic power and use it to bend weaker minds to his will—or break them entirely.

The meteor fragment, known as a chaos shard, screams with psychic energy, so much so that even

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the neogi's mental powers were put to the test in manipulating it. Wasting no time, Yalax used the shard to dominate other creatures he encountered in the caves beneath the Chaos Scar, including troglodytes, meenlocks, and an umber hulk. Pleased with his newfound slaves, Yalax turned his thoughts toward acquiring more chaos shards; however, the neogi knows of several recent incursions into the Chaos Scar by meddlesome soldiers and adventurers from Restwell Keep, and he doesn't want them interfering with his own planned excavations.

The inhabitants of Restwell Keep pose a threat to Yalax. By neogi reasoning, they must be subjugated or destroyed. Commanding his umber hulk slave to burrow a miles-long tunnel to the keep (an ambitious endeavor), Yalax broke into some old catacombs and turned them into a temporary lair. Using the chaos shard, Yalax has begun bombarding the keep above with waves of psychic energy, while dispatching meenlock servants to lure the keep's addled inhabitants into his clutches. Those who are captured are transformed by the meenlocks into monstrous slaves.

In addition to orchestrating the disappearances, the neogi has also used the chaos shard to drive the keep's lord, Lord Drysdale, half-mad with delusions. Drysdale is convinced that the Six Blades of Fortune—the former rulers of Restwell Keep—have returned, despite the fact that they're all dead (slain by Drysdale). The paladin sees his old enemies lurking about and, in his madness, fears that the Blades intend to reclaim the keep. Drysdale has declared martial law. His soldiers, most of them suffering delusions of their own, have sealed the gates, jailed people whom they suspect are in cahoots with the Six Blades, and ransacked homes, searching for their elusive quarry. As the heroes contend with their own visions and jittery emotions, they must choose to either stand by while Restwell Keep spirals into madness or decide that it is up to them to save it.

Adventure Synopsis

A strange madness is sweeping through Restwell Keep. As fear and paranoia grow, the characters find they are not immune. Moreover, several of the keep's inhabitants have disappeared without a trace. To discover what is causing the widespread madness and the disappearances, the adventurers must interact with the keep's remaining inhabitants and search for clues. At the same time, they must contend with Lord Drysdale and his soldiers, who are obsessed with a nonexistent threat brought on by their own madness.

Clues eventually lead the adventurers to a forgotten cellar below the bailiff's tower of Restwell Keep, which in turn leads to some old catacombs wherein the adventurers face several enslaved troglodytes guarding the way to Yalax's lair, while simultaneously fending off a psychic assault from the chaos shard.

As the adventurers descend into Yalax's lair, they are mobbed by meenlocks and former Restwell Keep citizens transformed into meenlock minions. Once they reach the floor of the Pit of Delirium, the heroes are within striking distance of the shard but must finally defeat Yalax and his umber hulk.

The Adventure Begins

When you're ready to begin the adventure, read:

Restwell Keep stands on the edge of turmoil. No one is allowed in or out while the garrison searches for evidence of a plot to overthrow Lord Drysdale. The soldiers seem unusually troubled, and you hear whispers among the common citizens that Drysdale has lost his mind and is haunted by the ghosts of dead enemies, believing that the Six Blades of Fortune—the former rulers of Restwell Keep—have returned from the dead to overthrow him.

Lord Drysdale isn't the only one plagued by delusions. Fear and paranoia have spread like a fire through the keep; you can see it etched on the faces of guards and commoners alike, and tensions are mounting. In the two days you've been holed up in the keep, you've experienced your own strange visions and sudden mood swings. It's as though a contagion has swept through the keep.

As if the madness isn't enough, six guards and six commoners have gone missing in the past week. Still, Drysdale's soldiers seem more interested in the threat posed by the Six Blades of Fortune. If something isn't done, fear and paranoia will shake Restwell Keep to its foundations.

No one is allowed in or out of Restwell Keep while Drysdale's soldiers search for the nonexistent Six Blades of Fortune. If the adventurers try to leave, there's little the guards can do to detain them (at this point in their careers, the characters are much too powerful). Your goal should be to provide incentives for them to stay. Hopefully you can leverage the relationships the characters have developed with the citizens of Restwell Keep; however, you might need to throw in the promise of a reward to hook the players.

For example, self-centered characters might be enticed to stay by the possibility of seizing power from Lord Drysdale or the opportunity of looting the keep amid the chaos.

PREPARING FOR THE ADVENTURE

The adventure begins with the characters killing time in Restwell Keep. They begin experiencing strange visions planted in their minds by the neogi's chaos shard.

After the party spends at least 24 hours in the keep, each character becomes afflicted by a madness that fades only when he or she is no longer within 1 mile of the chaos shard. These afflictions present roleplaying challenges for the players, as well as make the threat of the chaos shard personal. To determine the nature of each character's affliction, roll a d4 and consult the list below, or assign a random affliction to each character.

1. The character sees people, things, or both that no one else can see. Such delusions might elicit feelings of shame, terror, guilt, or some other strong negative emotion.
2. The character suffers moments of emotional instability, becoming suddenly angry, upset, or morose for no good reason.
3. The character is convinced that certain others are conspiring against him or her.
4. The character is haunted by fleeting shadows and ghost sounds that reflect a secret fear or guilt.

The characters must not only deal with Drysdale's lockdown of the keep but grapple with their own mental afflictions, as described in the "Preparing for the Adventure" sidebar. Investigating the cause of the madness is handled as a skill challenge (see "Skill Challenge: Uncover the Truth" below). As they root out the cause, the characters also pick up several quests (see "Quests" below).

The visions and madness caused by the chaos shard are already widespread by the time the characters begin suffering the effects. Visions are usually subtle and menacing, and most citizens affected by the chaos shard are too afraid to speak of their affliction openly out of fear of persecution or because of the guilt, shame, or confusion brought on by their affliction.

By portraying the keep's residents as paranoid or manic, you can create interesting roleplaying opportunities for yourself and the players.

Skill Challenge: Uncover the Truth

The adventurers must wade through the paranoia and confusion in Restwell Keep to find clues leading to the neogi's lair. In this challenge, the characters try to make sense of the bizarre occurrences and unexplained disappearances.

Feel free to incorporate roleplaying opportunities and red herrings as part of this skill challenge; for example, the characters might be approached by a paranoid commoner who claims to know the true threat to the keep. She leads them to a stone well within which she hears demonic voices; however, the characters quickly confirm the voices aren't real.

Each skill check represents at least 1 hour of investigation. If the heroes are successful, they discover the cellar in the bailiff's tower and the umber hulk's tunnel.

Each time the party succeeds on a skill check as part of this challenge, give them one quest (see "Quests" below) until all three quests are given out.

Level: 9 (400 XP).

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

Special Rules: Each time a skill check is called for, a character must use a particular skill against a specific DC, as indicated in the following table.

Order	Skill Check Required
1st check	DC 25 Arcana
2nd check	DC 17 Streetwise
3rd check	DC 17 Diplomacy
4th check	DC 17 Intimidate
5th check*	DC 25 Insight
6th check*	Any of the above (player's choice)

* If needed to succeed in the skill challenge

The players decide which character makes each check, and the other characters can provide aid if they want to. If a check succeeds, the party obtains a clue or a valuable piece of information, as indicated below. After making six skill checks, the heroes will have either succeeded on or failed at the skill challenge; if they succeed, they will have earned the final piece of information pointing to the bailiff's tower.

Primary Skills: Arcana, Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate, Streetwise.

Arcana (DC 25): The first successful check reveals powerful mind-affecting magic engulfing the keep. A second successful check allows the character to ascertain that the magic is strongest in and around the bailiff's tower.

Diplomacy (DC 17): With careful words, the character convinces a guard to divulge information. The first successful check reveals that three of the missing guards were on night patrol when they "just wandered off." A second successful check reveals that the other three missing guards were posted at the bailiff's tower on the nights they disappeared.

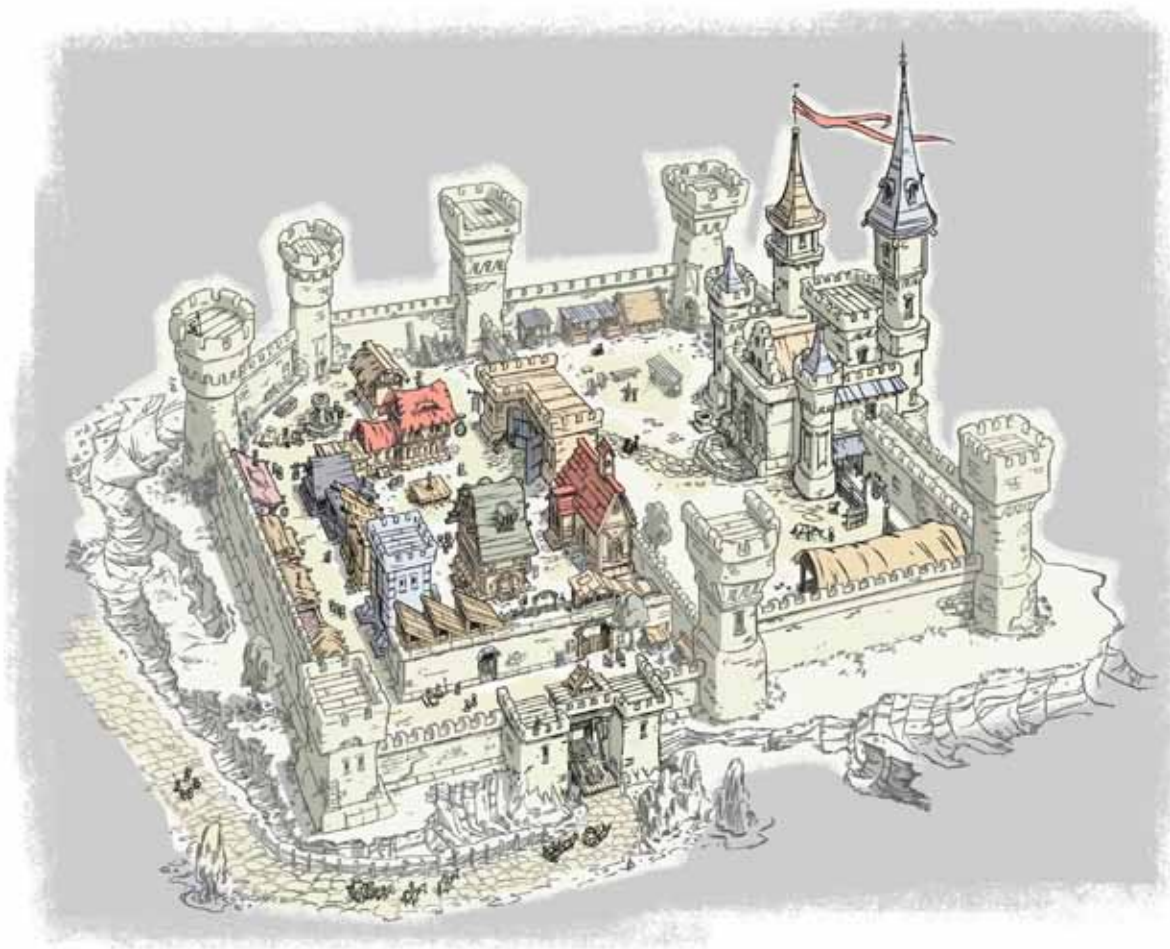
Insight (DC 25): The first successful check reveals that all of the keep's inhabitants are affected by the madness; however, some are better at hiding their symptoms. A second successful check reveals that citizens living near the bailiff's tower exhibit the worst symptoms.

Intimidate (DC 17): The character presses a guard to divulge information. A guard admits to seeing an evil creature skulking around at night. It looked like a short, bug-eyed humanoid with pincers for hands (a meenlock); the guard dismisses it as "a fever-induced delusion." A second successful check reveals that some of the missing guards were posted at the bailiff's tower on the nights they disappeared.

Streetwise (DC 17): The first successful check reveals that all six missing commoners were behaving erratically or seemed deeply troubled before they disappeared. A second successful check reveals that all the missing folk disappeared at night, and one of the commoners was last seen in the vicinity of the bailiff's tower.

Success: All information leads the characters to the cellar of the bailiff's tower, where they find the umber hulk's tunnel.

Failure: The characters are unable to track the source of the madness to the bailiff's tower before they arouse the hostility of the keep's guards. Drysdale's guards try to arrest the characters, but they're significantly lower in level and aren't a genuine threat. If the characters allow themselves to be detained for questioning, they are interrogated until they divulge the whereabouts of the Six Blades of Fortune or until they convince the more levelheaded guards to release them (which is best handled as a roleplaying encounter). The sergeant of the guard, Garrick Blackoak (see "Quests" below), might be instrumental in securing their release. Once they've freed themselves from captivity, the characters can attempt the skill challenge again.



Quests

As they wrestle with their own madness and the rampant paranoia in Restwell Keep, the characters receive the following quests. The quests are given out in the course of completing the skill challenge described above. Each time the party succeeds on a skill check as part of the challenge, give them one quest until all three quests are given out.

End the Chaos (Major Quest): As Lord Drysdale's delirium becomes the subject of fear and mockery throughout the keep, the adventurers are approached by Chendera, the keep's priestess of Avandra. Chendera is deeply concerned about Lord Drysdale's actions. Afraid that he will never surrender control of Restwell Keep, Chendera begs the heroes to intervene on behalf of the keep's citizens, not just to root out the cause of Drysdale's delirium but also to stop Lord Drysdale before he becomes a mad despot. If they succeed, the characters will earn the appreciation of the common folk within the keep—and perhaps the enmity of their scornful lord.

Major Quest Reward: 2,000 XP per character for destroying the chaos shard and restoring the peace.

Break the Wizard's Trance (Major Quest): Citirian, master of the Saruun wizards' guild, is suffering more than anyone else in the keep. Thanks to the chaos shard, Citirian has become trapped in an arcane labyrinth of his mind's creation. His apprentices have tried for days to free the wizard from his trance but have been unsuccessful. Valtaris, one of the apprentices, suspects that a chaos shard is responsible for all the trouble in the keep and suspects the shard is somewhere close by. Furthermore, he fears that destroying the shard might also shatter his master's mind. Valtaris asks the adventurers to recover the shard and allow him and Citirian's other apprentices to use their arcane knowledge to manipulate the shard's energy in order to safely release the entranced wizard. Although Valtaris's intentions are truly noble, the heroes might suspect that he has ulterior motives, further confusing the situation.

Major Quest Reward: 2,000 XP per character for delivering the chaos shard to Valtaris or for breaking Citirian's trance without killing him. If he survives, Citirian rewards the party with a level 11 rare or uncommon magic item.

Find the Missing Guards (Minor Quest): Garrick Blackoak, Drysdale's sergeant of the guard, carries out his lord's commands to hunt down the imagined Six Blades of Fortune but is more concerned with finding his missing soldiers.

Minor Quest Reward: 400 XP per character for determining that the missing soldiers were transformed into meenlock spawn and telling this to Blackoak.

The Bailiff's Tower

This square tower, perched at the keep's southeast corner, contains quarters for the bailiff and his scribe. However, neither individual is currently residing in the tower. See "Keep on the Chaos Scar" in *Dungeon* 176 for more information about these people.

The Bailiff: Kendon Longstrider has been arrested on suspicion of colluding with the Six Blades of Fortune. Kendon has long expressed misgivings about Lord Drysdale's rule; consequently, Drysdale was quick to have him thrown in the dungeons.

The Scribe: Syradon was taken prisoner along with the bailiff. Although it's widely believed that the young man is deaf and dumb, Lord Drysdale thinks there's more to Syradon than meets the eye. Consequently, the scribe is now a "guest" in Drysdale's fortress.

Entering the Tower

The tower's thick oak door is locked. A character can pick the lock with a DC 20 Thievery check, but doing so without being seen by nearby guards also requires a DC 25 Stealth check (or DC 20 at night). Fallek, the corporal of the guard assigned to the main gate, has a key that a character can steal with a DC 17 Thievery check.

The heroes can also beg a key from Garrick Blackoak, the sergeant of the guard (see "Quests" above).

In addition, Yalax's troglodyte thralls found a key to the tower after the bailiff was arrested and taken away. They keep their key hidden under a straw mat just inside the door.

The tower's ground floor is a general living space. Stone stairs climb to the second floor and descend to the cellar. The second floor once served as quarters for the bailiff and the scribe and contains their cots as well as some treasure. A creaky wooden ladder leads from the second floor to the rooftop battlements.

Treasure: Characters looting the tower for treasure find a locked strongbox (Thievery DC 20 to open) containing 500 gp destined for the keep's treasury. They also find a tiny holy symbol of Ioun on a silver chain; this belongs to Syradon and is worth 10 gp.

Exploring the Cellar

Characters searching the cellar of the bailiff's tower quickly find the umber hulk's tunnel hidden behind some empty crates and barrels. The tunnel is an 8-foot-wide hole in the floor haphazardly covered with wooden boards. (The meenlocks placed the boards to conceal the tunnel mouth, albeit poorly.)

The tunnel burrows through the earth and clay, spiraling downward at a 45-degree angle for 100 feet before breaking into some old catacombs. A DC 17 Dungeoneering check reveals that a large burrowing creature dug the tunnel; a character whose check result is 22 or higher recognizes the work of an umber hulk.

If the characters descend the tunnel, proceed with **Encounter 1: Old Catacombs**.

Yalax's Secret Lair

Three encounters await the adventurers in the old catacombs beneath Restwell Keep.

In Encounter 1: Old Catacombs, the heroes fight their way past a gang of enslaved troglodytes.

In Encounter 2: Fate Worse than Death, the heroes learn the fate of those who went missing from the keep and try to eliminate Yalax's meenlock servitors.

In Encounter 3: Pit of Delirium, the chaos shard attacks the heroes' sanity as they struggle to wrest it from the clutches of Yalax and his umber hulk thrall.

Once the heroes defeat Yalax and either destroy or retrieve his chaos shard, the adventure is over.

Concluding the Adventure

If the heroes defeat Yalax and bring the chaos shard to the surface, Citirian's apprentices can study it and find a way to destroy the shard without harming the wizard (see "Quests" above). If the heroes destroy the shard, Citirian falls into a coma. Freeing him from his coma requires a Remove Affliction ritual. Once restored to his waking senses, the grateful Saruun wizard might become the party's newest benefactor, giving them leads to new adventures.

Destroying the shard ends the madness in Restwell Keep. Kendon the bailiff and Syradon the scribe are released from custody. The keep's citizens and defenders are deeply troubled by recent events, and faith in Lord Drysdale's leadership is sorely shaken. If the characters invest money and time to revive the citizens who were transformed into meenlocks, they become popular figures in Restwell Keep and might find themselves at the center of an uprising, allowing them to usurp Drysdale's mantle of leadership and assume control of the keep. (If his authority is contested, Drysdale backs down without a fight and returns to Fallcrest in disgrace.)

Were they to take charge of the keep, the heroes could wage open war against the monstrous inhabitants of the Chaos Scar. If Yalax escaped, the heroes might encounter the neogi again, hiding in a cave complex deep within the Chaos Scar and plotting his revenge.

About the Author

Jeff Morgenroth lurks on the outskirts of Seattle, where he games, thinks, writes, and tinkers away the days. He loves the mountains, dice, martial arts, and his sweetheart, Mariah. Seek him wherever the chorus of frogs drowns out sounds of the highway, or where heavy-metal power chords shatter the still of dark places.

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Encounter 1: Old Catacombs

Encounter Level 9 (2,304 XP)

Setup

1 troglodyte temple champion (T)
2 troglodyte impalers (I)
8 troglodyte grunts (G)

The adventurers reach this area by following the umber hulk's tunnel from the cellar of the bailiff's tower in Restwell Keep. As it nears this room, the tunnel dips 15 feet below floor level. It then climbs sharply and erupts from the floor in the southwest corner.

When the heroes peer into the room, read:
The tunnel breaks through the floor of a vaulted chamber supported by thick stone columns and marked with piles of ancient rubble. A revolting stench fills the room, and pale reptilian creatures lurk in the shadows—troglodytes.

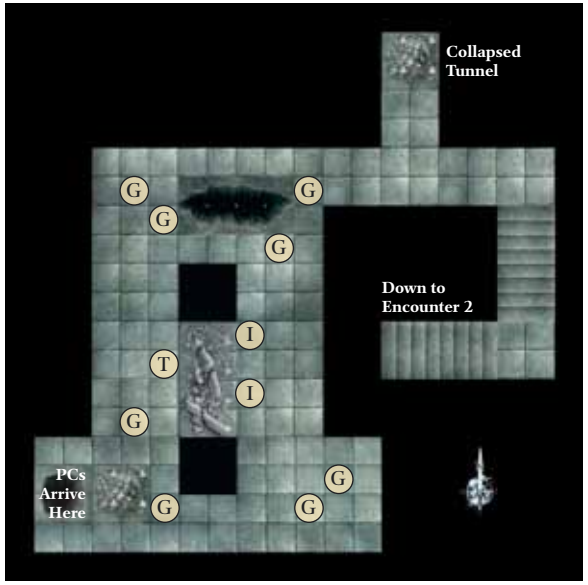
There are no light sources in the room. The troglodytes rely on their darkvision to see.

Chaos Shard Delirium

During the battle, Yalax's chaos shard plants delusions in the minds of the adventurers to make them think slain troglodytes are suddenly returning to life. Characters can fight off the delirium induced by the chaos shard, treating it as a hazard.

DM Tip: If you're using miniatures to represent the troglodytes, consider using tokens or other markers to indicate which ones are delirium-induced troglodytes risen from the dead.

Chaos Shard Delirium I Terrain	**Level 9 Elite Hazard** XP 800
Detect –	**Initiative** –
Immune attacks	
Triggered Actions	
Undying Troglodytes (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: A troglodyte dies in the encounter.	
Effect (No Action): At the start of its next turn, the dead troglodyte appears to rise up. This illusory troglodyte has the statistics of a normal troglodyte (including full hit points), except that its attacks deal psychic damage instead of any other damage type. When it drops to 0 hit points, the illusory troglodyte appears to die and does not rise up.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Regain Sanity:** Insight DC 17 (minor action 1/round). *Success:* The character is convinced that the delirium-induced troglodytes aren't real, and the illusory troglodytes do not attack the character for the rest of the encounter. Once all the characters have succeeded on this check, the hazard is overcome and does not trigger again.	
✦ **Resist Delusions:** Perception DC 17 (minor action 1/round). *Success:* Until the start of his or her next turn, the character gains resist 5 psychic against attacks made by illusory troglodytes.	
✦ **Reassure Ally:** Heal or Intimidate DC 17 (minor action). *Success:* The next time an ally fails an Insight check made against this hazard, he or she can reroll the check and use the new result instead.	



Tactics

The troglodyte temple champion and troglodyte grunts mob the heroes while the impalers harry them from a distance with thrown javelins.

Yalax enslaved the troglodytes several months ago. Since then, the chaos shard has ravaged their minds and made them completely subservient.

Features of the Area

Illumination: None. The room is illuminated only with light the adventurers bring with them.

Collapsed Hallway: Rubble chokes a corridor in the northeast corner of the room. This passage collapsed many years ago and might lead to other sections of the old catacombs. Excavating the hall is a major operation requiring several days and is beyond the scope of this adventure. However, if you want to expand the old catacombs, this corridor provides the means.

Troglodyte Temple Champion (T)	**Level 9 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 400
HP 101; **Bloodied** 50	**Initiative** +9
AC 25, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20	**Perception** +6
Speed 5	Darkvision
Traits	
☼ **Troglodyte Stench** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Living enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Flail** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage.	
⊛ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 6 damage.	
⸸ **Sweeping Trip** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target falls prone.	
✧ **Whirlwind Attack** (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d10 + 9 damage.	
Miss: Half damage.	
Skills Athletics +13, Endurance +14	
Str 19 (+8) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+6)	
Con 21 (+9) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+5)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Draconic	
Equipment scale armor, flail, 2 javelins	

2 Troglodyte Impalers (I)	**Level 7 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 300 each
HP 69; **Bloodied** 34	**Initiative** +5
AC 22, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 17	**Perception** +9
Speed 5	Darkvision
Traits	
☼ **Troglodyte Stench** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Living enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Spear** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.	
⊛ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage.	
⊹ **Impaling Shot** (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃	
Requirement: The troglodyte must be wielding a javelin.	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).	
Skills Athletics +12, Endurance +13	
Str 19 (+7) **Dex** 14 (+5) **Wis** 13 (+4)	
Con 21 (+8) **Int** 7 (+1) **Cha** 9 (+2)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Draconic	
Equipment spear, 6 javelins	

8 Troglodyte Grunts (G)	**Level 6 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 63 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +6
AC 20, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16	**Perception** +5
Speed 5	Darkvision
Traits	
☼ **Troglodyte Stench** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Living enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 7 damage.	
Effect: The troglodyte shifts up to 2 squares.	
Triggered Actions	
Scatter ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: The troglodyte is targeted by a close or an area attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The troglodyte shifts up to 2 squares to a square outside the triggering attack's area of effect.	
Skills Athletics +12, Endurance +13	
Str 18 (+7) **Dex** 13 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+5)	
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 4 (+0) **Cha** 9 (+2)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Draconic	
Equipment club	

Gaping Fissure: This naturally formed pit plunges 20 feet. Any creature falling into the fissure takes 2d10 falling damage. Buried in the loose rubble at the bottom of the fissure is a gold dwarf statuette inlaid with mithral filigree worth 1,000 gp. Anyone searching the bottom of the fissure automatically finds it.

Rubble: The piled remains of a shattered column as well as rubble cast aside from the umber hulk count as difficult terrain and provide partial cover to creatures kneeling behind them.

Staircase: These crumbly stone steps lead to a lower chamber. If the characters descend the stairs, continue with **Encounter 2: Fate Worse than Death**.

Encounter 2: Fate Worse than Death

Encounter Level 10 (2,656 XP)

Setup

2 meenlock stalkers (M)
12 meenlock spawn (S)

These lower catacombs are connected to the catacombs above by a stone staircase. Here the adventurers learn the fate of the guards and commoners abducted from Restwell Keep: The poor sods wallow alongside the meenlocks that have corrupted them.

When the heroes reach the bottom of the staircase, read:

Mounds of rubble litter the floor of this dusty chamber. Lurid orange light rises from the depths of a gaping pit surrounded by a crumbling stone staircase. The light barely illuminates a dozen or more foul shapes standing about the room. Three of them appear small and deformed. They leer at you with milky eyes, snap their pincers, and bare crooked teeth. The rest look like humans in the midst of becoming something else, their bodies crooked and stooped. They flex their claws and shamble forward with the intent to kill.

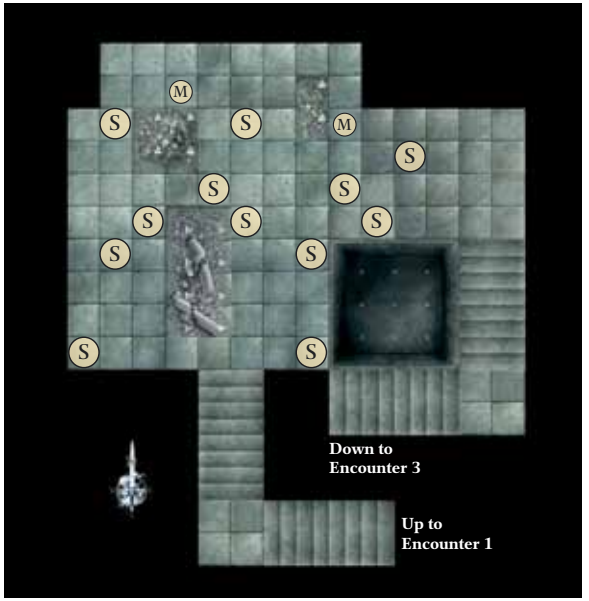
The citizens of Restwell Keep (six commoners and six guards) have been transformed into meenlock spawn. A DC 18 Dungeoneering check reveals that these people can be freed from the corruption only if the meenlock dominating them is destroyed. (Each meenlock stalker controls six spawn.) Even then, the spawn must also be slain and its body burned. The victim can then be restored to its true living form using a Remove Affliction ritual and Raise Dead ritual or powers such as the cleric's *holy cleansing* and *resurrection*.

Chaos Shard Delirium

During the battle, Yalax's chaos shard plants more delusions in the minds of the adventurers, making it seem as though the meenlocks (stalkers and spawn) can turn invisible. Characters can fight off the delirium induced by the chaos shard, treating it as a hazard.

DM Tip: If you're using miniatures to represent the meenlocks, consider using tokens or other markers to indicate which ones are invisible to the characters.

Chaos Shard Delirium II Terrain	**Level 9 Elite Hazard** XP 800
Detect –	**Initiative** –
Immune attacks	
Triggered Actions	
Invisible Meenlocks (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: A meenlock is targeted by an attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The triggering meenlock becomes invisible until this hazard is overcome or until a character successfully employs a countermeasure.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Regain Sanity:** Insight DC 18 (minor action, 1/round). *Success:* The meenlocks are no longer invisible to the character. Once all the characters have succeeded on this check, the hazard is overcome and does not trigger again.	
✦ **Detect Enemy:** Perception DC 18 (minor action, 1/round). *Success:* Until the start of his or her next turn, any meenlocks adjacent to the character are not invisible to that character.	
✦ **Reassure Ally:** Heal or Intimidate DC 18 (minor action). *Success:* The next time an ally fails an Insight check made against this hazard, he or she can reroll the check and use the new result instead.	



Tactics

The meenlock spawn obey the psychic commands of the stalkers and spread out to attack the characters with their claws.

The meenlock stalkers keep their distance, attacking the characters at range with *horrid link*, *maddening whispers*, and *twisting whispers*. A cornered stalker uses *dimension step* to extricate itself and move to a safer location within range.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light (shed by the chaos shard at the bottom of the pit). As one descends the pit, the light grows brighter.

Rubble: Treat these mounds of rubble as difficult terrain. The meenlock stalkers have buried a level 11 uncommon magic item under the smallest pile of rubble. Anyone searching the pile finds the item automatically.

Pit: The pit drops 40 feet to the floor of another chamber (see Encounter 3: Pit of Delirium). The stairs that hug the edge of the pit descend to the floor of this lower chamber.

Development

Characters infected with meenlock corruption will find themselves at a disadvantage in the next encounter (see Encounter 3: Pit of Delirium for details).

2 Meenlock Stalkers (M) **Level 9 Controller**
Small aberrant humanoid XP 400 each

HP 97; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +10
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22 **Perception** +9
Speed 5 Darkvision
Immune meenlock corruption

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.

Maddening Whispers (psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature affected by the stalker's *horrid link*); +12 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Twisting Whispers (charm, disease, psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature affected by the stalker's *horrid link*); +12 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target makes a basic attack against one creature of the stalker's choice as a free action. The target then contracts meenlock corruption (stage 1).

Move Actions

Dimension Step (teleportation) **✦ Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Effect: The stalker teleports up to 8 squares.

Minor Actions

Horrid Link (psychic) **✦ Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃
Effect: The stalker forges a link with one creature within 10 squares of it. The link lasts until the start of the stalker's next turn or until the stalker uses *horrid link* again. Whenever the stalker takes damage, the target of its *horrid link* takes 1d10 + 5 psychic damage.

Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +13

Str 10 (+4)	**Dex** 18 (+8)	**Wis** 11 (+4)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 13 (+5)	**Cha** 20 (+9)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech

Meenlock Corruption **Level 9 Disease**
Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -4 penalty to Will.
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target grants combat advantage.
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, unless prevented from doing so, the target moves toward the lair of the meenlocks that infected it. Treat the target as dominated by meenlocks until the target recovers from the disease.
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Insight check if it is at stage 1 or 2.
14 or Lower: The stage of the disease increases by 1.
15-19: No change.
20 or Higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

12 Meenlock Spawn (S) **Level 8 Minion Brute**
Medium aberrant humanoid XP 88 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19 **Perception** +5
Speed 5 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 10 damage.

Triggered Actions

Whisper of Death (psychic) **✦ Encounter**
Trigger: The spawn dies.
Effect: Each enemy adjacent to the spawn takes 5 psychic damage.

Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 16 (+7)	**Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 15 (+6)	**Int** 8 (+3)	**Cha** 9 (+3)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech

Encounter 3: Pit of Delirium

Encounter Level 11 (3,100 XP)

Setup

Yalax, neogi (Y)
1 umber hulk (U)
1 chaos shard (C)

The adventurers reach this area either by falling down into the pit or descending the stairs that encircle it.

When the adventurers reach the bottom of the pit, read:

The pit opens into a spacious chamber bathed in the lurid orange glow of a craggy stone fragment. Bizarre in texture and glistening with crystalline shards, it floats a few feet off the ground. You feel a psychic wind trying to draw you toward it, tearing through your mind with grim intent, and you see your doom reflected in its crystal shards.

Suddenly, immense shadows move across the walls of the room as two monstrous shapes appear from behind the floating shard. One is a hulking black biped with four eyes mounted above a pair of sharp mandibles. The other is a spidery abomination with the head and neck of an eel. It glares at you with savage hate.

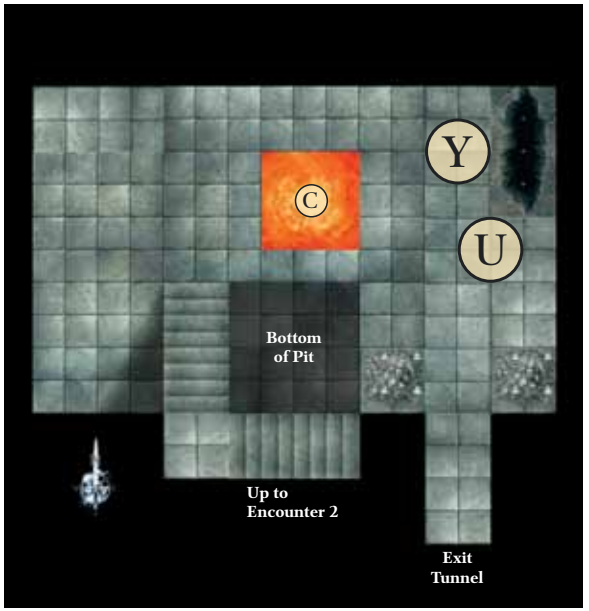
Characters can make a DC 19 Arcana check to recognize the floating stone as a chaos shard—a fragment of the meteor that formed the Chaos Scar.

The Chaos Shard

The chaos shard is a 1,000-pound spindle of jagged rock 5 feet thick and 7 feet tall. Despite its weight, it floats and can be pushed easily. If pushed over a ledge, it sinks slowly until it's levitating only a few feet above the ground.

If the chaos shard is destroyed, Yalax shrieks in fury as the delirium plaguing Restwell Keep ends abruptly. Unless the characters have their own light sources, the room goes dark.

Chaos Shard (C) Object	**Level 10 Hazard** XP 500
Detect –	**Initiative** +7
HP 66	
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 5, **Will** –	
Immune all conditions, necrotic, poison, psychic	
Traits	
☼ **Psychic Probe** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Enemies have vulnerable 5 psychic while in the aura.	
Enemies of the Shard	
The chaos shard has the same enemies as the creature that controls it.	
Standard Actions	
✧ **Winds of Madness** (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 psychic damage, and the chaos shard slides the target up to 2 squares.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Impede:** Arcana DC 18 (minor action). *Success:* The chaos shard cannot attack on its next turn.	
✦ **Control:** Arcana DC 26 (standard action). *Success:* The chaos shard targets the controlling creature's enemies on subsequent turns, until some other creature takes control of the shard. *Failure:* The creature is stunned until the end of its next turn.	



Tactics

The chaos shard begins the battle under Yalax's control and assails enemies with *winds of madness*. Characters can take control of the shard and use it to attack Yalax and the umber hulk. If this happens, Yalax attempts to regain control.

Yalax uses *enslave* and *mind twist* to turn his enemies against one another. The neogi can tell which enemies are infected with meenlock corruption (see Encounter 2: Fate Worse than Death) and targets them foremost. If Yalax is bloodied and the umber hulk is slain, the cowardly neogi uses *psychic shackles* to restrain enemies before fleeing through the exit tunnel (see "Features of the Area"). In melee combat, Yalax uses *scything claw* to slide enemies into the chaos shard's aura or within range of the shard's *winds of madness* attack.

The umber hulk uses *confusing gaze* to keep the party as near to it as possible and *rending claws* against grabbed prey.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light (the chaos shard).

Exit Tunnel: Leading away from the chamber is a rough-hewn tunnel flanked by two mounds of rubble (difficult terrain). The miles-long tunnel, which was created by the umber hulk, leads back toward the Chaos Scar, eventually breaking the surface amid a copse of trees. The tunnel serves as Yalax's escape route.

Pit: A rough-hewn, 10-foot-deep pit in the northeast corner serves as Yalax's nest. Characters searching the nest find a level 13 uncommon or rare magic item and two gemstones worth 1,000 gp each.

Yalax (Y) **Level 11 Elite Controller**
Large aberrant magical beast XP 1,200

HP 228; **Bloodied** 114 **Initiative** +5
AC 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23 **Perception** +12
Speed 6, climb 4 (spider climb) Darkvision
Immune dazed
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Telepathy ✦ Aura 10
Yalax can communicate telepathically with any creature in the aura, provided the creature has a language.

Standard Actions

Scything Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 10 damage, and Yalax can slide the target 1 square.

Enslave (charm, psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 12 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to the attack rolls of attacks that include Yalax as a target (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is dazed and takes the -2 penalty (save ends both).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is instead dominated (save ends).

Psychic Shackles (charm, psychic) **✦ Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +14 vs. Will
Hit: 3d8 + 15 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Minor Actions

Mind Twist (charm, psychic) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Will
Hit: The target makes a basic attack against a creature of Yalax's choice as a free action. The target can choose not to make the attack and take 15 psychic damage instead.

Triggered Actions

Larva Burst (zone) **✦ Encounter**
Trigger: Yalax is first bloodied.
Attack (Free Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 18 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
Effect: The burst creates a zone of squirming grubs and larvae that lasts until the end of the encounter. The zone is difficult terrain.

Skills Arcana +14, Bluff +15, Insight +12, Intimidate +15
Str 17 (+8) **Dex** 11 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 19 (+9) **Cha** 21 (+10)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech

Umber Hulk (U) **Level 12 Elite Soldier**
Large natural magical beast XP 1,400

HP 248; **Bloodied** 124 **Initiative** +11
AC 25, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23 **Perception** +13
Speed 5, burrow 2 (tunneling) Darkvision, tremorsense 5
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Requirement: The umber hulk must not have a creature grabbed.
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 10 damage.

Double Attack ✦ At-Will
Effect: The umber hulk uses *claw* twice. If both attacks hit the same target, the umber hulk grabs the target (escape DC 20).

Rending Claws ✦ At-Will
Effect: Melee 2 (one creature grabbed by the umber hulk). The target takes 40 damage.

Minor Actions

Confusing Gaze ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +15 vs. Will
Hit: The umber hulk slides the target up to 5 squares, and the target is dazed until the end of the umber hulk's next turn.

Skills Arcana +14, Bluff +15, Insight +12, Intimidate +15
Str 26 (+14) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 5 (+3) **Cha** 11 (+6)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

New Monster Theme:
Shadowborn

By Erik Scott de Bie ✦ Illustration by Chippy

"I was born to shadow, and in the shadow I abide."

The Shadowfell might echo the mortal world, but its fundamental nature makes it far more dangerous for mortal creatures than their own world is. Here, one breathes in the gloom, and over time it saturates the flesh and the soul. This infection initially manifests as a deep melancholy and a generalized anxiety, but it can grow worse, resulting in insanity and physical degeneration. Such maladies are all too common in the Shadowfell.

Creatures native to the land of shadows are known as shadowborn. Many seem identical to their worldly counterparts, but a good number have characteristics that reflect the influence of their home plane on their minds and bodies. The abilities presented below can be added to various creatures to create a variety of shadowborn.

Shadowborn look like their counterparts in the world, except that they are paler or darker and thus take on a deathly aspect. Their features are sunken and hollow; their eyes dance with shadow. Their forms sometimes appear to waver slightly, as though they are not entirely there. They exhibit the typical behavior caused by exposure to the Shadowfell, ranging from nervousness to paranoia.

Shadowborn tend to be unaligned. Any strong morality has bled out of them over years of living in the Shadowfell's gloom.

Origin: The creature's origin becomes shadow.

Senses: The creature gains low-light vision. Give it darkvision only if you think it's necessary due to the creature's powers.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Stealth checks.

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Attack Powers

Some shadowborn have developed ways to harness the essence of shadow and death to power their offensive abilities.

Grim Nexus

A shadowborn that loves the thick of melee combat, or that is loath to allow enemies to escape, might develop a shadowy step and an attack formed of grasping shadows that slash at enemies that try to evade the creature.

Standard Actions

Grim Nexus (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**

Effect: This creature teleports up to 8 squares.

Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); level + 3 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target takes ongoing damage equal to 5 + one-half this creature's level (save ends). If the target ends its next turn farther away from this creature than where it started its turn, it cannot make a saving throw against the ongoing damage.

Hollow Stare

Some shadowborn can make their faces appear as death masks, displaying the horror of the Shadowfell before a victim. This power, especially helpful for controllers, keeps enemies at bay.

Minor Actions

Hollow Stare (fear) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: This creature pushes the target up to its speed, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Utility Powers

Shadowborn manipulate shadow with ease, seeming to bring life to the darkness.

Create Gloom

This power helps a creature that is more comfortable in shadow and darkness find some. It is best used sparingly, rather than given to numerous creatures in an encounter.

Minor Actions

Create Gloom ✦ **At-Will**

Effect: Area burst 1 within 10. Bright light within the burst's area becomes dim light, and dim light within the burst's area becomes darkness. This effect lasts until the creature uses this power again or until the end of the encounter.

Ghost Strike

The shadar-kai originally developed this power to combat each other's *shadow jaunt* ability. It packs a nasty surprise for an opponent that relies on insubstantiality for protection.

Minor Actions

Ghost Strike (psychic) ✦ **Encounter**

Effect: This creature's next attack roll targets Will instead of the defense it normally targets. If that attack roll hits, its damage ignores insubstantial, and the target also takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Level 11: Ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends).

Level 21: Ongoing 15 psychic damage (save ends).

Night's Veil

Darkness can hide danger from the human eye, but some shadowborn creatures have a trait that cause them to simply disappear in lightless conditions.

Traits

Night's Veil

While within darkness, this creature is invisible.

Rise Again

Some shadowborn can tap into darker aspects of the Shadowfell, enabling them to momentarily defy death.

Traits

Rise Again (healing)

When an attack that isn't a critical hit drops this creature to 0 hit points for the first time during an encounter, the creature falls unconscious until the start of its next turn. At the start of this creature's next turn, it regains 1 hit point and can then stand as a free action.

Shadow Double

This power creates a shadowy image of its user that aids in setting up combat advantage and can help cover a retreat.

Minor Actions

Shadow Double (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**

Effect: Close burst 10. This creature creates a shadow double in an unoccupied square in the burst. The double is immune to damage, but it occupies the square, and any enemy adjacent to it grants combat advantage to the double's creator. This creature can make opportunity attacks as if it occupied the shadow double's space. When no enemy is adjacent to the shadow double at the start of this creature's turn, or when the encounter ends, this effect ends.

Shadowdance

Practitioners of an ancient art called shadowdancing created this skirmisher power to grant enhanced combat mobility.

Move Actions

Shadowdance (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃

Effect: This creature teleports up to its speed, but it must begin or end this movement adjacent to a creature or at least 3 squares away from a light source.

Umbral Shroud

This power helps a shadowborn gain combat advantage, move with impunity, or cover an escape. You can alter it to be more defensive by making it an immediate reaction that triggers when the creature takes damage or is first bloodied. It's also fine if you customize it to allow darkvision to pierce the shroud as if it were normal darkness.

Minor Actions

Umbral Shroud ✦ **Encounter**

Effect: Close burst 2. The burst creates an area of darkness that lasts until the end of this creature's next turn. The area blocks line of sight, and squares within it are totally obscured. Creatures are blinded while in the area. This creature is immune to these effects.

Barel, Gnome Shadowdancer

A descendant of a gnome clan that fled the fomorians in ancient times by traveling to the Shadowfell, Barel is a Gloomwrought native. He learned the skills of shadowdancing, which he now puts to work in assassination and robbery missions he undertakes on behalf of various noble and merchant houses. Barel might cross blades with adventurers after they anger the wrong person in the City of Midnight.

About the Author

Erik Scott de Bie is a freelance game designer who has worked on such products as the *Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*™ boxed set and the forthcoming *Neverwinter*™ *Campaign Setting*. He also writes fantasy novels in and outside the Forgotten Realms® setting. His next novel, *Shadowbane*, is due out in September 2011.

Barel, Gnome Shadowdancer	**Level 5 Skirmisher**
Small shadow humanoid, gnome	XP 200
HP 62; **Bloodied** 31	**Initiative** +8
AC 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17	**Perception** +3
Speed 5	Low-light vision

Traits

Reactive Stealth

If Barel has any cover or concealment when he rolls initiative, he can make a Stealth check to become hidden.

Combat Advantage

Barel can score a critical hit on a roll of 19-20 against any creature granting combat advantage to him.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Scimitar** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and Barel can slide the target 1 square.

Effect: Barel can shift 1 square.

† **Shadowdancer's Strike** (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 3d6 + 6 damage, and Barel slides the target up to 2 squares. Additionally, each time Barel hits the target, he can shift 1 extra square and slide the target 1 extra square (save ends).

Effect: Barel shifts up to 2 squares.

Move Actions

Shadowdance (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃

Effect: Barel teleports up to his speed, but he must begin or end this movement adjacent to a creature or at least 3 squares from a light source.

Triggered Actions

Fade Away (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**

Trigger: Barel takes damage.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): Barel becomes invisible until after he hits or misses with an attack, or until the end of his next turn.

Skills Bluff +10, Stealth +11

Str 10 (+2)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 12 (+3)	**Cha** 16 (+5)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven

Equipment hide armor, scimitar

Enemies and Allies: Gloomwrought's Movers and Shakers

By Andy Clautice

Illustrations by Eric Belisle, Chippy, Kerem Beyit, and Warren Mahy

The streets of Gloomwrought are unforgiving. Undead prowl the unlit alleys at night, and gargoyles lurk on rooftops, watching for unwary travelers to pick off. If one is to survive in the City of Midnight, he or she needs allies. Even as certain groups such as Midnight's Own, the Ghost Talon, and Houses Harskel and Carradh vie for control of the city, other individuals and organizations are content to play at neutrality. However, few in Gloomwrought are without motivation, and friends can quickly become enemies when different goals collide.

The following section details several key characters in Gloomwrought who can serve as adversaries or allies to adventurers.

Triptam Clevane, Legendary Thief

In his heyday, Triptam Clevane was Gloomwrought's most notorious thief. For nearly a year, Trip stole anything that caught his eye. Early in this spree, the merchants thought a criminal gang was sweeping the city. Once all the evidence was sifted, the entire crime wave was traced back to one individual, and the noble houses were both furious and terrified.

So great was Trip's reputation that ships docking in the city started to leave a portion of their cargo unguarded on their decks for him. The captains hoped such efforts would keep their crew from being drugged and their locks from being destroyed. In other parts of the city, however, would-be victims were not so accommodating, and over time Trip accumulated a few narrow escapes to go with his many successes.

Career Change: When the narrow escapes became almost as frequent as his successful jobs, Triptam did the smart thing: He stopped being a criminal. Before the Deathless Watch could catch up to him, the burglar applied his treasure-hunting skills to a new career as an explorer and adventurer for hire. He took missions both inside and outside Gloomwrought, even working under contract to Prince Rolan for some time.

As part of their arrangement, Rolan rented Trip's services out to the various houses. At first, his assignments consisted mainly of retrieving stolen goods from pirates or the city's lesser thieves. As time passed, Trip's missions took on the flavor of his old work when the houses began using him as a weapon against each other. During one two-month stretch, working for one group and then another, Trip stole and restole the same load of astral silk five times. And each time, slightly less of the merchandise made it back to his current employer's warehouse.

Life in Retirement: After his contract with Prince Rolan expired, Triptam retired gratefully. Today, he runs Trip's, a seedy pawnshop where he uses his expertise in assessing the value of treasure.

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Trip fences stolen goods from all parts of the city, specializing in unique or remarkable items others would balk at trying to move. He knows the city well enough to surmise most items' exact origins and how each landed on his counter.

Triptam in Combat

Triptam isn't looking for a fight; it's goods he's after. Of course, that doesn't mean he won't duke it out to save his own neck or clear a path to a fantastic bauble. He relies on his stealth and thieving abilities to maneuver into a prime spot from which to launch his attack. While his targets are still unaware of his presence, he uses *flash of blades* to shift out of hiding and attack his opponents before moving into the perfect defensive location. As far as Trip is concerned, dying is never on the day's agenda, and he flees if he thinks his chance of recovering the goods is blown.

ROLEPLAYING TRIPTAM

Bored with the usual riffraff, Triptam's interest is piqued when adventurers come into his shop. He is also wary. He remembers how the adventuring game is played, and he knows his operation looks unsavory.

Trip responds to strong-arming or accusations with an aggressive warning, or even violence. If characters stop in on business, he is respectful, treating them as equals. As long as the encounter stays friendly, Triptam offers what information he can to help adventurers track down particular items. Although the retired thief never names names, he willingly mentions a particular area or tavern the heroes should check out. Such locales should lead the characters to the person they're seeking.

If the party brings Trip any interesting items, he grins in welcome, especially if he recognizes the goods as stolen or recovered illicitly. If he is impressed with the merchandise, the old rogue might drop hints about possible jobs and the haul they could bring.

Triptam Clevane, Legendary Thief	**Level 13 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 800
HP 125; **Bloodied** 62	**Initiative** +14
AC 27, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 25	**Perception** +11
Speed 7	

Traits

Combat Advantage

Triptam deals 2d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to him.

Spry Recovery

Whenever Triptam starts his turn immobilized or slowed, he makes a saving throw to end the effect, even if the effect doesn't normally allow a saving throw.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC

Hit: 4d4 + 11 damage.

Effect: The target cannot make opportunity attacks until the end of Triptam's next turn.

⸸ **Flash of Blades** (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied

Effect: Triptam shifts up to his speed and can make the following attack three times during this movement, making each attack against a different target.

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC

Hit: 2d4 + 11 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 damage and is slowed (save ends both).

Move Actions

Quick Feet ✦ **At-Will**

Effect: Triptam and one creature adjacent to him each slide 1 square, swapping positions.

Skills Stealth +17, Streetwise +15, Thievery +17

Str 15 (+8)	**Dex** 23 (+12)	**Wis** 10 (+6)
Con 13 (+7)	**Int** 17 (+9)	**Cha** 19 (+10)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

Equipment leather armor, dagger

Mar and Kur, Graveyard Grifters

Changing appearance is simple enough for doppelgangers, but these two swindlers make it an art form. Mar and Kur have developed perfect imitations of undead mannerisms, and to round out their performances, they douse each other in noxious cologne they've concocted to make themselves smell like freshly disinterred corpses. Their disguise is so clever that unintelligent undead creatures treat the charlatans as allies.

ROLEPLAYING MAR AND KUR

Mar and Kur are hard to differentiate from mindless undead when they're in disguise. But the adventurers might also encounter the two while they're out scavenging in other guises. Perhaps the party is protecting a cache of supplies the doppelgangers want, or maybe the heroes have been tasked with finding out why intruders can bypass wards set to keep out undead.

If the adventurers discover the doppelgangers' true nature, Mar and Kur attack. If they're outmatched, the swindlers offer to help the heroes in any way they can. They will do anything to stay alive and out of lockup.

Side Note: After the first time an undead returns as a result of Kur's *zombification*, you can let players know that as a minor action, they can perform a coup de grace to decapitate an unconscious undead to prevent the creature from returning as a result of the aura.

Mar, Graveyard Grifter **Level 7 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger) XP 300

HP 78; **Bloodied** 39 **Initiative** +7
AC 21, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 21 **Perception** +8
Speed 6

Traits

Deep Cover
When Mar uses *change shape* to look like an undead creature, other undead creatures treat Mar as if he were undead.

Grifter's Advantage
Mar deals 2d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to him. This extra damage increases to 3d6 if Mar is flanking the creature with an undead ally.

Standard Actions

Slam ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.

Minor Actions

Change Shape (polymorph) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: Mar alters his physical form to appear as a Medium living or undead humanoid until he uses *change shape* again or until he drops to 0 hit points. To assume a specific individual's form, Mar must have seen that individual. Other creatures can make a DC 28 Insight check to discern that the form is a disguise.

Misleading Lurch ✦ Recharge when first bloodied
Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.
Miss: Half damage, and the target falls prone.

Triggered Actions

Horde's Defense ✦ At-Will
Trigger: Mar's movement triggers an attack against him.
Effect (Free Action): The attack instead targets one of Mar's undead allies adjacent to the attacker.

Skills Bluff +13, Stealth +10

Str 17 (+6)	**Dex** 15 (+5)	**Wis** 10 (+3)
Con 14 (+5)	**Int** 11 (+3)	**Cha** 20 (+8)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

It's a Living: The grifters live in the Graveyard, and leave that area only to scavenge, swindle, and steal goods and supplies for personal benefit.

More intelligent undead creatures can see through Mar and Kur's deception. However, most prefer to use them rather than kill or punish them. The Charnel Fangs, for example, work with the doppelgangers, allowing them to loot the bodies of the vampires' victims. In exchange, Mar and Kur scout out new victims and occasionally bring them to the Charnel Fangs.

Kur, Graveyard Grifter **Level 7 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger) XP 300
HP 75; **Bloodied** 37 **Initiative** +3
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 21 **Perception** +8
Speed 6

Traits

☼ **Zombification** (healing) ✦ **Aura** 3
Whenever an undead ally in the aura dies, it does not die but instead falls unconscious until the start of its next turn, when it returns with 1 hit point. A creature adjacent to an unconscious undead creature can perform a coup de grace as a minor action to prevent it from returning.

Deep Cover
When Kur uses *change shape* to look like an undead creature, other undead creatures treat Kur as if he were undead.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage.

Barreling Bolt (force) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 5 force damage, and the target falls prone.
Effect: Kur pushes the target up to 2 squares.

Draining Lash (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d8 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is slowed and weakened (save ends both).
Effect: Each undead ally in the burst deals 5 extra necrotic damage until the end of Kur's next turn.

Minor Actions

Change Shape (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Kur alters his physical form to appear as a Medium living or undead humanoid until he uses *change shape* again or until he drops to 0 hit points. To assume a specific individual's form, Kur must have seen that individual. Other creatures can make a DC 28 Insight check to discern that the form is a disguise.

Triggered Actions

Undead Empathy ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy's attack damages Kur while at least one undead ally is within 3 squares of him.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The damage this attack deals to Kur is reduced by 5, and an undead ally within 3 squares of him takes 5 damage.

Str 17 (+6)	**Dex** 10 (+3)	**Wis** 10 (+3)
Con 11 (+3)	**Int** 12 (+4)	**Cha** 20 (+8)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

Mar and Kur in Combat

The doppelgangers keep a cadre of undead around to use as cannon fodder and to enable them to take advantage of Mar's *horde's defense* and Kur's *zombification* aura. Marv and Kur are capable combatants, but their self-preservation instincts dominate their behavior in combat. If they can escape, they do. If they can't, they try to strike a deal.

Nira, Daughter of Death

High priestess of a Raven Queen temple is a significant position anywhere, but in Gloomwrought, and at Raven's Eyrie, it is a coveted seat of power. Nira, a shadar-kai orphan raised in the flock, was quick to solidify her control after being named daughter of death. She ousted several priests who disagreed too vehemently with her beliefs and elevated others to her personal council, including her brother, Oristus.

Early Relationship with Death: When Nira and Oristus were children, pirates razed their home territory, killing their parents and neighbors. While the experience hardened Nira, she held fast to her memories of love and fellowship, and she found solace in the Raven Queen's promises. She grew to be a formidable leader, gaining a depth of awareness that often startles strangers. However, that awareness did not extend to her childish faith in Oristus.

Through the years, Nira's brother remained a steadfast supporter of hers, and she adored him. Blind to his faults, Nira elevated him to her personal council, never noticing that her brother had hardened into a brittle, inflexible man. Without Nira's knowledge, Oristus formed the Ghost Talon, a faction within the flock dedicated to the superiority of the shadar-kai.

When Oristus's betrayal was revealed, it was as though a blindfold fell from Nira's eyes. And she mourned for her brother, who had clearly been broken on that horrible night decades ago. Eventually, Oristus's play for power in the Eyrie grew too disruptive, and Nira had no choice but to cast him from the flock.

Raven Queen's Work: Although her estrangement from Oristus remains a tender issue, Nira doesn't allow it to distract her. She has work to do. Ironically, a top priority of hers runs parallel to one of

the Ghost Talon's aims: dethroning Prince Rolan. A man who cheats the Raven Queen, she believes, is a clear enemy and shouldn't be ruling Gloomwrought. Nira is also eager to unravel the mystery of the keepers, welcoming any information that could help expose their secrets.

Nira, Daughter of Death Level 15 Controller (Leader)	
Medium shadow humanoid, shadar-kai	XP 1,200
HP 146; **Bloodied** 73	**Initiative** +9
AC 29, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 29	**Perception** +14
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Traits	
Ephemeral of Ravens ✦ Aura 1	
Allies in the aura have partial concealment.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Queen's Blessing** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 10 damage, and one ally adjacent to Nira gains 5 temporary hit points.	
Shroud of Winter (cold, zone) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied	
Effect: Nira creates a zone in a close burst 1 that lasts until the end of her next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all creatures except Nira. Any enemy that ends its turn in the zone takes 10 cold damage.	
Move Actions	
Shadow Jaunt (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: Nira teleports up to 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the end of her next turn.	
Triggered Actions	
Slip of Fate ✦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to Nira hits her.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Nira slides the triggering enemy 1 square.	
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 15 (+9) **Wis** 25 (+14)	
Con 18 (+11) **Int** 23 (+13) **Cha** 22 (+13)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment cloth armor, mace	

ROLEPLAYING NIRA

Nira is curt with outsiders who come to the temple, but not hostile. If any members of the party are followers of the Raven Queen, her demeanor improves considerably. She drops subtle hints that the devoted adventurer could be destined for great opportunities, and she might offer the party a chance to earn her gratitude.

She begins with quests that she believes will gain the party's sympathy, such as rescuing an agent of hers from the Ghost Talon. Later quests promote the temple and attack its enemies more and more overtly. If the party chooses to continue helping, each successful mission increases Nira's trust in the heroes. Eventually, the adventurers learn her true goal: unseating Prince Rolan and offering him to the Raven Queen.

Nira in Combat

A battle with Nira should involve other priests and followers of the flock. Nira does her best to keep allies in her aura while using *slip of fate* to protect herself. If the fight goes poorly, she uses *shadow jaunt* and *shroud of winter* in a bid to escape. If Nira ends up in combat with Oristus, she refuses to target him and even sacrifices faithful priests to keep him from harm.

Fortenk, Time Collector

The Shattered Isles are abandoned. The nobility, merchants, and even time have fled since the Sever unmade the Tower of the Planes' link to the multiverse. It's a mesmerizing phenomenon to Fortenk, the tower's former clock-keeper. He has spent decades examining how time froze at the moment the isles were severed from the rest of the city—nothing moving, ticking, or aging.

Then: After Fortenk had spent many years researching the Sever's origin, the buildings' histories, and the precise geographical requirements that planar links rely on, he began to understand how time manifests. In an exhilarating moment of awareness, Fortenk decided to find a way to travel back in time and reverse the Sever.

Eventually, the gnome's experiments revealed that he could steal time and history from other people, and he began doing just that. Of course, time is not so easily manipulated, and Fortenk lost his own sense of its progress.

Now and Then: Fortenk's memory flits between stages of his life, and he has lost track of how far along he is in his research. Stuck in a loop, the gnome steals time to retrace the steps he forgot or to take the steps he has yet to travel. It's only a matter of time before his own timeline becomes so knotted that the gnome stops, as frozen in his frenzy as the severed islands were in theirs.

Now: Fortenk's home and workspace is a disaster area, figuratively and literally. The burned-out clock tower is broken and weathered. Its tilted floors are strewn with Fortenk's notes, but he barely notices anymore. The pages aren't that important anyway, not since his experimental unwinding of time unwrote so many of his thoughts. His numerous metaphysical tests have birthed dozens of failed temporal experiments, time-warping mists, and unstable portals that send people hurtling into random eras.

Thief of Time (Hook): Gloomwrought residents are occasionally found standing perfectly still, as though frozen in place. If the adventurers investigate,

Fortenk, Time Collector Small fey humanoid, gnome	**Level 8 Lurker** XP 350
HP 68; **Bloodied** 34	**Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20	**Perception** +4
Speed 7	Low-light vision
Immune slowed	

Standard Actions

Steal Time ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Will

Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage, and the target loses its minor action on its next turn. If it is Fortenk's turn, he can take an extra move action this turn.

Step out of Time ✦ Recharge when Fortenk uses *steal time*

Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Will

Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of Fortenk's next turn.

Effect: Fortenk is removed from play until the start of his next turn, when he reappears in an unoccupied space within 3 squares of the square he last occupied. When he reappears, his attacks deal 2d6 extra damage until the end of his next turn.

Triggered Actions

Time Fades Away (illusion) **✦ Encounter**

Trigger: An enemy damages Fortenk.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst). The target is removed from play until the end of its next turn, when it reappears in an unoccupied space of its choice within 3 squares of the square it last occupied. Then Fortenk becomes invisible until he hits or misses with an attack or until the end of his next turn.

Str 10 (+4)	**Dex** 12 (+5)	**Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 14 (+6)	**Int** 20 (+9)	**Cha** 18 (+8)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven

Equipment leather armor, rod

they find that victims skip backward in time and then redo exactly what they had done in the minutes before becoming stuck in time. By piecing together mentions of a gnome, his strange clothes, and other clues, they can figure out that Fortenk is the cause. He's well known in the city and is regarded as a harmless eccentric.

Fortenk in Combat

Fortenk is a particularly perplexing opponent since, at times, he vanishes or his enemies disappear, with one or both reappearing moments later near the spots from which they vanished. The gnome might have a plan for how he's fighting, or perhaps his future self does. Sometimes, Fortenk looks surprised to be in battle at all.

About the Author

Andy Clautice has been designing games for over 15 years, but only recently for public consumption. He currently lives in Denver, toiling to bring the latest and greatest to your computer screen.

ROLEPLAYING FORTENK

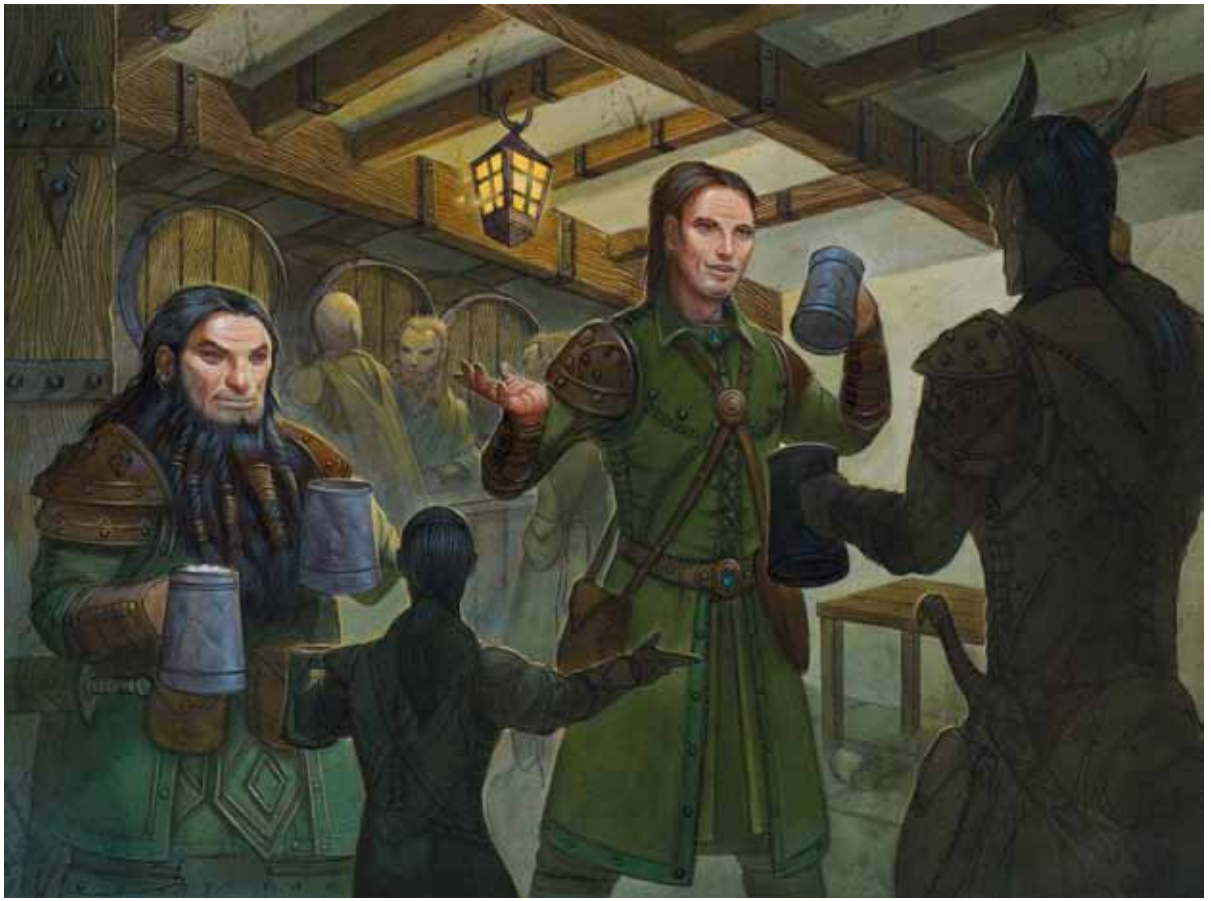
Fortenk is friendly and remarkably loud. A DC 16 Arcana check reveals that he is unnaturally fast, a side effect of his exploration into temporal rituals. Those studies have distorted Fortenk's sense of time. He has no idea how long it's been since the Sever, nor does he know how long he's been in conversation with the adventurers, or whether he still is.

The gnome isn't capable of keeping appointments anymore, and anyone wanting a word has to come to him. Fortenk still seeks information about the Sever and its effects. He particularly covets samples from the Dust Quarter, since Gloomwrought's shifting also doesn't affect that area, and the gnome would trade much for an actual piece of the Deathless Palace.

Questions from Far and Near

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland
Illustration by Wayne England

I receive questions from a lot of people, not only through the website, but via email, social media, and chats with fellow Dungeons & Dragons® players at conventions and around the game table. Every so often, I gather some of the more entertaining examples into a column. I hope you enjoy these gems from the past few months, and that my sparkling advice will help save your game—or at least make it a bit more fun to run and play.



Come on, I'm Begging!

I feel embarrassed asking this, but how can I convince my girlfriend to play Dungeons & Dragons? I've hinted, I've asked nicely, and I've badgered. I'm on the verge of begging. It's a great game. It's a fun game. It's something that I love to do. I know that she'd enjoy it if she would try it, so how do I persuade my girlfriend to roleplay?

–Roger
At a convention

The cheeky part of me (and that's a sizable chunk) wants to respond with something like, "Roleplay? This is not that type of column." Seriously, though, I'm with you, brother. My wife and I have been together for almost 20 years, and she's not into Dungeons & Dragons or any other roleplaying game.

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It may sound strange, but I'm sympathetic to her point of view. Roleplaying games are a hobby that can border on obsession. Our wives, husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, and significant others have to put up with hearing about the Caverns of Klaithor and the oh-so-clever trap we placed in the dungeon near the main cavern. Sometimes, they even smile and give us valuable feedback.

It's okay if they're not as passionate as we are about our favorite things. We should be thankful that they're supportive, and we should show our gratitude by respecting their limits. So don't lament that your girlfriend will not play the games that you love. Trust me, you're lucky: She's putting up with you.

Planned Absenteeism

My question concerns creating a campaign for a group in which various people will be periodically absent.

Seven of us—one Dungeon Master and six players—play a campaign together, but sometimes one or more of us can't make it to a session. Our policy has been to play if the Dungeon Master and at least five players can attend. Otherwise, we cancel.

I think that we still have enough people to play Dungeons & Dragons, even if we're short a Dungeon Master or two players, as long as we don't play our main campaign. I'd like to create an interesting adventure that will be played on an irregular schedule and can handle an ever-shifting lineup of characters. Do you have any recommendations or warnings?

—Alternate Andrew
Via email

Episodes are your friends. But before I talk about that, I have some words of warning: A campaign like the one you describe is tricky, not only because it is the secondary campaign (which may cause some people to feel less invested in that campaign), but also because it is a substitute game.

Like everyone else, players fall into rhythms. For months (if not years), they habitually sit at the same table and play the same characters with the same group of people. Holding your secondary game in the same location as your primary campaign will be awkward at first, because your players will need time to get into their new characters and to learn their mechanics. I recommend making your new game as different from your ongoing campaign as possible. It's not a deal-breaker, but your substitute game should be fun and should stand out in your players' minds; using a different approach is one way to accomplish that. I suggest playing an entirely new system, but if you are already in a standard "points of light" campaign, then starting up a Dark Sun® campaign or a *D&D® Gamma World™ Roleplaying Game* adventure will work equally well.

When I say that episodes are your friends, here's what I mean: Plan a story with discrete beginning, middle, and end points that you can complete in one play session. I'll admit that this is easier to pull off when playing at the heroic tier than at the paragon or epic tiers, where both plots and combats become more complex. But you are playing sporadically, so chances are good that you'll remain in the heroic tier for a while. If the game takes off (and replaces the main campaign or gains a life independent of the whims of erratic scheduling), then you can expand the episodes out to last multiple sessions.

Don't have stories that rely on the participation of a particular character; that road leads to heartache.

Consider using the quest system described in the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide®*. Focus each session on a clear, concise quest and invent a backstory that complements it. Maybe the group is composed entirely of members of a strike force assembled by a local prince, wizard, or temple. Alternatively, perhaps the characters are members of an adventuring society or a school for gladiators.

Make the sessions unique, memorable, episodic, and fun, and you will create an alternative campaign that your players will love and want to continue—while not feeling so bad when their schedules force them to bail out.

Silence 15-Foot Radius

My players show up for games on time, but they waste an hour telling stories and stupid jokes before we start, and they keep it up while the game is under way. I yell at them, but they blow me off. How can I shut them up?

—Jonathan the Yeller
Via email

If your group's anything like mine, then it's filled with people who like each other and wish that they could spend more time together. Unfortunately, school, work, family, and other intrusive aspects of real life stand in the way. My suggestion is this: Don't fight them—join them. Let them kibitz. You might find that you enjoy the camaraderie.

Start the session early if you can. It will help your players satisfy their need to socialize without impinging on game time. Eventually, one of them will say, "Aren't we supposed to be playing a game?" That's when you begin: when they are ready.

I Need a Scribe Hireling in Real Life

I enjoy being a Dungeon Master, but I never take good enough notes. During the gap between games, which can last a few weeks to a month, I forget small details that I mentioned to the players in the course of the previous session. As a result, I spend half of the next game backtracking.

Any idea how I can improve my note taking, my memory, or both?

–Thomas Backtracker
In a conversation

We've all been there, Thomas. When you're juggling the details required to run an adventure or resolve an encounter, you're bound to lose track of a few of the finer points. I recommend that you buy a digital recorder. They are amazingly cheap these days.

You don't have to record the entire session–only the bits and pieces in which you discuss information with your players. Don't worry about recording entire combat rounds, either: If the recorder is off when you say something important, then turn it on and repeat what you said. When you prepare for the next game, listen to what you said at the last one. You can jot down notes if you like, but you might find that reminding yourself of your earlier conversations provides all the jogging your memory requires.

If you are not good at taking notes, you might as well use today's technology to make your life easier. Maybe if the conversations are funny enough, you can post them as part of a podcast.

Learning to Fly

My adventure has reached a point where many of the characters fly or are good at climbing–which is a problem, because I have a hard time keeping track of the game's third dimension. I know flying stands exist, but I haven't found one that handles every problem well. For example, what happens when two creatures occupy the same space at different altitudes? Right now we end up with a jumble of miniatures.

–Lisa the Acrobat
Via email

If you are playing with miniatures, then tracking movement in the third dimension is easy: Use the counters in *Monster Vault*® or another Dungeons & Dragons product to represent creatures at various altitudes. The flat counters stack or slip easily under miniatures, so they cut down on table clutter. Because you already know whether a creature is flying, climbing, or burrowing, this approach should meet your needs. Let your players track their characters' own altitudes.

If you are the type of Dungeon Master who demands a rigorous accounting of grid locations, then you can use dry-erase or wet-erase markers to note each creature's altitude or depth on its counter. Use positive numbers to denote distance above the surface and negative numbers for depth below ground. You can also use grease pencils if you don't want to bother with markers.

The marker approach works better with wet-erase markers, because dry-erase notes are harder to rub off after they dry. Here's a tip: Use a wet-erase marker to clean up dry-erase ink. If you write over the dry-erase mark with wet-erase ink, then the dry-erase ink will come right off. Wet-erase markers can clean up some permanent markers in the same way, but I wouldn't count on that if I were you: Save that trick for when someone accidentally grabs the wrong marker and ruins something important.

When and How to Say No

Wow, I'm getting fat. I love gaming, but the snacks that everyone brings to share are killing me. It seems like I spend half of the game with my hand in the cookie jar. How can I avoid packing on pounds at the game table?

Okay, this question is from me. But I'm sure that I'm not the only gamer with this problem.

How does your group deal with snacks? Have you made a concerted effort to limit them? Do you prepare a feast for the event? Do you care? I am especially interested in advice from those of you who have successfully brought healthy snacks to the table and convinced your players to follow suit, but I'd like to hear thoughts from the rest of you as well–whether your preferences are healthy, heart-attack-inducing, or otherwise.

Sign on to the Save My Game group on the community page and let me know how you treat snacks at your game. I'll present some of the best (or funniest) advice in next month's column. In the meantime, you can read the submissions on the group page.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland is a game designer living large in the Seattle area. He was a developer for D&D 4th Edition, a content developer for 3rd Edition organized play, and he has taught game design for the past three years. Stephen currently works at Paizo Publishing as a designer for the *Pathfinder* roleplaying game, writes "Save My Game," and works on the occasional D&D product. He also runs more games than his wife would prefer.

DARK·SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

Kalidnay

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Lorraine Schleter

Kalidnay was once a great power in the Tyr Region. That changed centuries ago when a force unknown to the other sorcerer-kings abruptly destroyed the city-state, leaving its citizens slain and its sorcerer-king, Kalid-Ma, missing. To outside observers, one day Kalidnay was a vibrant city; the next, it was an empty shell bereft of life.

Kalid-Ma ruled his city and its domains with iron authority, as other sorcerer-kings do. His greatest lieutenant was the templar Thakok-An, who was a fearsome master of the Way and a ruthless arcanist. During the days of Kalid-Ma's rule, Kalidnay was among the wealthiest of the city-states, and Kalid-Ma was a formidable defiler who inspired dread in his rivals.

Despite Kalidnay's prominence, Kalid-Ma was unsatisfied. He sought the ultimate defiler's apotheosis—transformation into a dragon. Kalid-Ma's metamorphosis progressed too slowly for the impatient monarch. He began supplementing the process with spells of his own creation.

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Other sorcerer-kings learned of Kalid-Ma's plans. They plotted to attack Kalidnay and slay Kalid-Ma while he was weak from his ritual-working and before he could complete his change. Thakok-An learned of this plot, and seeking to be the hero, she chose to act in her king's defense rather than inform him of the scheme against him. Kalid-Ma's greatest spells were inscribed in texts that Thakok-An could access, and she began searching the sorcerer-king's knowledge for a way to aid him. She found what she was looking for.

One night during Kalid-Ma's ascension ritual, Thakok-An led her family to the top of the great ziggurat in the heart of Kalidnay, inside which Kalid-Ma was performing his rite. There, Thakok-An began working magic with her newfound skills, slaughtering her relatives to provide the energy needed for her mighty spells. She believed her family's blood would strengthen Kalid-Ma's ritual and hasten his change.

Thakok-An's pride led to her fall as much as her cruelty did. Her understanding of her ritual was tragically incomplete. At the conclusion of her ceremony, a great fissure sundered the ziggurat. Powerful defiling magic began to flow through the streets of Kalidnay, killing uncounted numbers of citizens instantly. Tremors shook the city. Thakok-An fell into the rubble and lost consciousness.

Kalidnay in the Gray

Thakok-An awoke to find that Kalidnay had survived the calamity. However, it had been changed. The city originally sat on a dry plain, but now rested on an island in a sea of silt. The sky had darkened, but the heat was as oppressive as ever. Thick haze blocked sight out to any significant distance beyond the silt-lined shores.

It took some time for Thakok-An to discover what had happened. She found Kalid-Ma's body, inert but alive, in the remains of the ziggurat. In the desecrated streets, she located only a handful of living citizens. The city was in shambles and had been reduced to a shade of its former glory. Thakok-An's folly had thrown Kalidnay into the Gray and forced the city's king into a lasting sleep.

Kalid-Ma's body now reposes in state inside the remains of the ziggurat. Scattered groups of forsaken citizens occupy various homes, most in the city's central district, where Kalid-Ma's palace, arena, and ziggurat stand. Other buildings have crumbled from disuse, neglect, and the decay of the Gray. The streets are more dilapidated and more dangerous the farther one strays from inhabited areas.

In the Gray, Kalidnay is cut off from the rest of Athas. Travel to the city is nearly impossible, and escape from it even more difficult. Weird forces bind Thakok-An, as well as those who were present when the city fell, to the city's island. Further, knowledge of planar travel is rare on Athas, and few would voluntarily come to Kalidnay even if they could. The Gray is a terrifying place where the lost dead linger. Devils and other horrific creatures roam the wastes, some of which trouble Kalidnay intermittently. The city still has some of the resources of its heyday, but survival in this bleak realm can be harder than in the wilds of Athas.

All of the above notwithstanding, one sure way exists to bring the unfortunate and the foolishly bold to the lost city-state. At night, a strange mist flows through the streets of ruined Kalidnay on Athas. This mist draws anyone within the ruins into the Gray. Those caught by the mist wander aimlessly in the fog for a time, and then emerge within the Gray version of Kalidnay. But being trapped in the shadow city is a vile sort of exile. Death might be preferable.

Ruined Kalidnay

On Athas, Kalidnay stands west of Balic, northeast of Walis and near Fort Melidor, a House Shom trading post. Ruins are all that remain of the once-glorious city-state. Although the city was transported into the Gray, it was simultaneously left behind on Athas. As a result, there are two cities of Kalidnay; one has fallen into ruin and is now inhabited by undead, and one survives in the Gray and still boasts a small population. Ruined Kalidnay, on Athas, has been partially reclaimed by the sands of the desert. Undead wander the cracked streets and lurk in crumbling buildings. Sands encroach more on Kalidnay every year, burying the ruins and creating hidden chambers and halls.

Typical travelers don't come near Kalidnay, fearing they might stumble into its sand-covered reaches. The mystery of the city's loss mingles with tales of shambling horrors, restless ghosts, and deadly mists to keep out all but the reckless, the lost, and the desperate. Besides, treasure hunters assume that any easy looting must already have been done.

Those rash enough to brave the decaying buildings and undead of ruined Kalidnay might be able to find some trove as yet undiscovered. However, the stories are right enough about the city's dangers. Countless bodies of former residents—those that haven't taken on monstrous unlife—slump over furniture or sprawl on floors or in the streets, their remains mummified over time in the waterless environment. It is clear that whatever doom came to this place, it came swiftly. None of the inhabitants had any chance to prepare for the end.

KALIDNAY AT A GLANCE

Kalidnay was once a major city-state whose ruler was a rival of the most powerful sorcerer-kings. Now, it is a city in two parts. The ruins of Kalidnay on Athas are all that remain in the natural world. A shadow city also exists in the otherworld known as the Gray.

Population: At Kalidnay's zenith, nearly 15,000 people called it home. Now, on Athas, Kalidnay is a city populated only by undead. In the Gray, shadow Kalidnay shelters roughly 2,000 people, with another 400 people living in the client village of Artan-Ak. Most of the inhabitants of Kalidnay and Artan-Ak are humans, among them a few half-giants, elves, and dwarves. The nature of the Gray has warped numerous individuals who live and have been born in Kalidnay since its arrival in the realm of shadow.

Water: On Athas, Thakok-An unleashed defiling magic on the city and spoiled the wells, leaving most of the water poisonous or supernaturally deadly. In the Gray, Kalidnay and Artan-Ak have springs and wells that draw fresh if bitter water up from underground aquifers.

Supplies: Kalidnay's ruins on Athas might as well be part of the wilderness around them. Few if any means can be found to aid survival. In the Gray, shadow Kalidnay is a city with more nonperishable resources than inhabitants. Since so few people live within Kalidnay now, entire neighborhoods contain intact stores. Citizens of the city undertake expeditions to hunt and recover hidden caches of supplies. Beasts from the Gray that have become trapped within Kalidnay also provide a source of food and goods for those willing to risk hunting the creatures.

Additionally, Kalidnay receives regular food shipments from Artan-Ak.

Defense: Kalidnay's ruins have no organized guard or soldiery, relying instead on dark legends and undead creatures to take care of trespassers. In the Gray, Kalidnay has little need for defense. Thakok-An maintains a small force of soldiers and templars active to deal with shadow monsters, as well as to keep the citizenry in line.

Since the city's exile into the Gray, Thakok-An has developed some control over the forces that trap Kalidnay on the desolate plane. As a result, she can create a massive barrier of shimmering heat in a radius around the island. This barrier can burn to ash those who fail to turn back and instead attempt to endure and pass through the heat. This effort is taxing for Thakok-An, however. She uses it only when the threat is dire.

Inns and Taverns: A few taverns still operate near the center of the shadow city, offering regular customers a brief escape from what passes for a life in the Gray. But shadow Kalidnay sees almost no visitors, leaving no call for inns. Intruders in shadow Kalidnay rarely have need for shelter, since Thakok-An makes sure to capture outsiders, question them intensely about how they came to the city, and then put them to other uses. Those who displease Thakok-An end up in the arena as soon as she has everything she needs from them.

KALIDNAY'S POWER STRUCTURE

Thakok-An is the ultimate power and authority in shadow Kalidnay. Acting as steward for Kalid-Ma, Thakok-An has assumed a role much like that of a sorcerer-king, commanding the templars as though she were the ruler. Most of the templars and citizens of Kalidnay still consider Kalid-Ma to be their rightful sorcerer-king. Thakok-An, they say, is his representative while he sleeps. Whispers that Thakok-An is a usurper travel quietly through some circles, causing a few people to plot rebellion. Thakok-An's paranoia and ruthlessness have kept all such plans from seeing any success.

To retain her hold upon the city-state, Thakok-An is forced to keep Kalid-Ma alive. At the same time, she must maintain the deception that she is working to restore the sorcerer-king's consciousness. The former she achieves through sacrifices and combat in the arena, but the latter is a far trickier matter. Thakok-An maintains the pretense that she frequently labors in the ziggurat's chambers and library to find a way to rouse the king.

To this end, Thakok-An controls Kalid-Ma's collection of arcane knowledge completely, forbidding access to other templars. If they were allowed to read these works, the others could learn the truth about what happened to Kalidnay. Worse, the others might come across Thakok-An's most unspeakable allies. In her search for knowledge, the templar has turned to creatures, infernal and otherwise, that inhabit the Gray. She has made pacts to learn arcane secrets and gain a private force of fighting fiends.

Templars

Templars of Kalidnay consider themselves to be devotees of Kalid-Ma, not of Thakok-An. A few of Kalidnay's remaining templars were alive during the reign of Kalid-Ma, having prolonged their lives through magic. Thakok-An has initiated subsequent generations of templars. The ritual that inducts a templar into service binds that templar to the sleeping sorcerer-king, planting the seeds of arcane potential. The method that produces this pact between templars and Kalid-Ma was one of the first rituals that Thakok-An recovered from Kalid-Ma's records after Kalidnay's fall. Countless templars have tried—through means honest and dishonest—to obtain this knowledge from Thakok-An. None has succeeded. Although repeatedly rebuffed, a few high-ranking templars regularly beg Thakok-An to share the ritual for fear that it might be lost with her if she perishes. In this political atmosphere, some of these templars resort to using outsiders to penetrate the defenses Thakok-An has placed upon the ziggurat.

Soldiers

The military and police force of shadow Kalidnay is known as the *kalid-to*, a phrase that means "the fist of Kalid-Ma" in the cultural language of Kalidnay. With only a couple thousand citizens inhabiting Kalidnay, it stands to reason that the soldiery should have few warriors. But Thakok-An has sustained the *kalid-to* at the same size since the city's arrival in the Gray. She controls the *kalid-to* directly, using it to keep budding rebellions at bay. The *kalid-to* also maintains her power over the population in the village of Artan-Ak.

It is crucial that Kalidnay receives regular supplies of food from Artan-Ak, since the land around Kalidnay produces poor crops. Members of the *kalid-to* accompany caravans to and from Artan-Ak to make sure no one disrupts Kalidnay's most reliable supply line. Disruption of such provisions could very quickly leave Kalidnay short of food. This shortage might then grant agitators the ability to more easily foment riots or even open revolt.

Since its rise to prominence in the Gray, with Thakok-An's encouragement, the *kalid-to* has upheld the tradition of mourning their sleeping king. Each member of the *kalid-to* wears armor stained or burned completely black. While on duty, the soldiers also cover all but their eyes with hoods and veils made of blackened lizard scales. Only when the king awakens to take back his throne can this mourning end. At that time, the soldiers wear the king's colors again to celebrate his revival.

The *kalid-to* also kills or captures monsters and sentient beings that trespass into Kalidnay's domain. Capture is preferred. Such prisoners are important fodder for Thakok-An's schemes, such as her real reasons for using Kalidnay's arena.

SHADOW RACES IN KALIDNAY

Since Kalidnay fell into the Gray, several generations of citizens have been born within the plane's strange environment. The Gray can change natural creatures in such time. Most of these people are shadowborn, trading the natural origin for the shadow origin and, perhaps, gaining low-light vision. To represent those whom the Gray has strongly warped, use the shadar-kai race. For characters, use the racial write-up for shadar-kai from *Dragon* 372, treating these folk as humanlike natives of shadow Kalidnay. For monsters, you can use shadar-kai or apply the shadowborn monster theme from *Dragon* 399. Some who live in Kalidnay, usually templars or others with magical power, take the shadow into themselves willingly. These people become shades as described in *Heroes of Shadow*.

Exploring Kalidnay

The city-state of Kalidnay is a faint shadow of its former strength and glory. With only two thousand inhabitants in a city meant to hold over seven times that many, large swaths of the city are not only uninhabited but also decaying from inattention and the influence of the Gray. Worse, the area around Kalidnay is barely fertile, and the city is regularly short on food despite regular shipments from its client village of Artan-Ak. Kalidnay has no trade partners and no interaction with settlements other than Artan-Ak.

The people of Kalidnay are descendants of the few thousand who survived the transition into the Gray centuries ago. Few have come to the city since, and fewer still have survived for long. As a result, the people of Kalidnay are very familiar with one another. Strangers are easily identified. City law requires residents to report suspicious visitors to the *kalid-to*. Citizens are likely to raise an outright alarm if any newcomers seem threatening. Otherwise, the inhabitants purposely avoid interlopers and obey the law. Only those who have reason to skirt the law speak to intruders in Kalidnay without reporting the interaction.

The folk of Kalidnay do their best to keep their city up. However, the structures in the city warp and

crumble faster than natural repairs and maintenance can set them right. The whole place has a decrepit look, much of it abject ruin, despite the efforts of those who live within.

Kalid-Ma's Ziggurat

The most prominent structure in Kalidnay is the great ziggurat that Kalid-Ma built in the city's center. Towering over all other structures, including the sorcerer-king's palace, the ziggurat has a vast interior that was heavily damaged during the incident that shunted Kalidnay into the Gray. Its labyrinthine hallways are choked with debris at critical locations. Structural damage has collapsed some passages and opened new ones.

Athasians sometimes claim that the ziggurat was intended as a great tomb for Kalid-Ma. This statement was a convenient untruth spread by the monarch to hide the fact of the matter from other sorcerer-kings. In actuality, the ziggurat was the focal point for Kalid-Ma's attempts to speed his transformation into a dragon. It is also rumored among the learned that Kalak stole from Kalid-Ma the knowledge of the ziggurat and its role in draconic apotheosis. This theft was the reason for the intense rivalry between the two sorcerer-kings. It might also have been the source of the plot among other sorcerer-kings to slay Kalid-Ma.

Inside the ziggurat rests the unconscious body of Kalidnay's sorcerer-king, in a coma as a result of the disaster that brought his city to the Gray. Thakok-An has placed a number of traps and wards throughout the ziggurat to keep anyone from harming Kalid-Ma's body. Although Thakok-An is looking for a way to revive the sorcerer-king, her lack of the necessary arcane knowledge has hampered her efforts. Further, having had a taste of power, Thakok-An is reluctant to give it up. She has instead ensured that no one can reach Kalid-Ma's body without serious risk. Kalidnay's citizens say that strange creatures roam the halls of the ziggurat when Thakok-An is away. The truth is that Thakok-An, unable and unwilling to trust the *kalid-to* and the subordinate templars, uses allied devils as guardians and warriors.

Thakok-An's Family: In addition to the defenses that Thakok-An has placed within the ziggurat, more than a few creatures the templar has no control over inhabit the structure. When Thakok-An sacrificed members of her family in her foolish and failed attempt to aid Kalid-Ma, several of her kin became ghosts and other undead as the city passed into the Gray. These creatures now haunt the edifice and its environs, showing their horrid forms often enough to consistently remind Thakok-An of her sins.

Arena

What was once a grand arena for the pleasure of the masses has since fallen into great disrepair. The upper reaches of the stadium are crumbling, and entire sections of the arena's seating area are at risk of deadly collapse. Some portions have fallen away, exposing massive pits within the stands. In other places, the stairs seem ready to disintegrate before a climber might be able to reach a higher level.

Despite these facts, the ruler of Kalidnay periodically organizes professional gladiator bouts and forces prisoners to fight in the arena. On the surface, these games are for the amusement of the people. The truth is more complicated.

Arena battles do indeed draw crowds, but some citizens think the gladiatorial combat is a waste. The city's sparse population diminishes with each melee. High-minded Kalidnayans refer to these profligate clashes as "decimations," suggesting that each time the games occur the city loses about ten percent of its people.

However senseless this sort of blood sport might seem in a city-state as underpopulated as Kalidnay, Thakok-An has good reasons for continuing the custom. Her rationale includes ridding the city of unwanted mouths to feed. But the deepest and most sinister truth is that Kalid-Ma, in his coma beneath the ziggurat, is still draining life energy to sustain himself. By holding regular gladiatorial events, Thakok-An funnels the life force of dying combatants into Kalid-Ma. Without these deaths, Kalid-Ma might begin to drain energy from Kalidnay's other citizens, leading to wasting death for the remainder of the populace.

Empty Districts

Most of shadow Kalidnay is deserted, at least as far as the city's citizens are concerned. Collectively known as the Empty Districts, these areas were once thriving but now have no one living in them. The Empty Districts are hazardous in the extent of their decay, and they serve to shelter horrors from the Gray. Despite these facts, some people undertake expeditions into the Empty Districts, risking life and limb to recover supplies and valuables that might still remain.

Gorg-Ol Thraxes: Those who have returned from scavenging missions report disappearances and desiccated corpses of fellow searchers dumped in the abandoned streets. Such occurrences are the work of thraxes that stalk the Empty Districts. All these thraxes descend from or once were decadent members of the Gorg-Ol family, one of Kalidnay's most powerful noble houses. The family members were swimming in a large pool inside their villa—a display of opulence practically unheard of on Athas—when Thakok-An's ritual went awry. Transition to the Gray

left them all filled with a terrible thirst that normal water could not slake. Only the moisture from a living body satisfies. To meet this unnatural need, the thraxes hunt the Empty Districts and the edge of central Kalidnay for the unwary and the unprepared.

House Vordon Compound

Located deep within the Empty Districts is the House Vordon compound, a walled cluster of buildings that is more fortress than mansion. Once, this compound was the seat of power for the Vordon merchant house. Horgus-Le, then the patriarch of House Vordon, was responsible for providing Thakok-An with the reagents she needed for her ritual the night that Kalidnay fell into the Gray. The wily old patriarch ensured that he and his retainers were outside the city on that evening, sparing them from Kalidnay's fall. House Vordon later relocated its power base to Tyr.

This compound was mostly empty when Kalidnay faced its doom. Now it belongs to a kaisharga named Laylon-Ka. A kaisharga is an undead creature similar to a lich, though it lacks a phylactery. Kaishargas trade life for power, unnaturally extending their existence for centuries. In life, Laylon-Ka was a House Vordon dune trader who was also a member of the Veiled Alliance. She thought her clandestine operations were secret, but they were the primary reason Horgus-Le abandoned her. Laylon-Ka turned to the study of shadow magic after Kalidnay's transition. She soon discovered a way to transform herself into an immortal being.

Any details about inhabitants of the House Vordon compound are kept secret, lest they draw too much attention. Still, Laylon-Ka has set herself up as the leader of a nameless organization, comprising a number of the city's most savvy explorers and thieves. Members can travel through the Empty Districts and the city's central areas with ease. Those who hope to delve into the Empty Districts might inadvertently hire members of Laylon-Ka's group, who make the best guides. The lich's unnamed cabal is one of the few power centers aside from Thakok-An's. Laylon-Ka also has one of the *Orbs of Kalid-Ma,* which she acquired from adventurers who were trapped in the worldly ruins of Kalidnay after nightfall.

Artan-Ak

On the northern end of the island where Kalidnay now rests is a small village called Artan-Ak. Artan-Ak was founded during the short time between Kalidnay's appearance in the Gray and Thakok-An's solidification of her power as steward of the city-state. The village stands amid the only arable land on the island—only here can the land be worked to produce significant crops. Unfortunately for the inhabitants of the village, Thakok-An demands the largest share of the harvests for delivery to Kalidnay to feed the populace, which would otherwise starve. Members of the *kalid-to* are stationed here to ensure that the villagers hold nothing back on their deliveries. When the food arrives in Kalidnay, Thakok-An's templars oversee its distribution, making it clear to the people of the city who controls their fate.

The Hidden Way: Unknown to Thakok-An, a young nobleman called Xaltan-Re founded a secret school of the Way in Artan-Ak during its early years. The school has survived to this day, and Xaltan-Re continues to teach, his life extended through his superior knowledge of psionics. Xaltan-Re teaches what he knows to those who show any sign of skill in the psychic arts. His disciples use their skills to muddle the minds of the *kalid-to* soldiers who come to the village. Xaltan-Re's hidden rebels do just enough to cause the soldiers to overlook particular storehouses and the occasional shipment that seems lighter than it should be.

Silt Sea

The island on which shadow Kalidnay is situated is in the middle of a vast tract of silt, similar to the Sea of Silt on Athas. Since Kalidnay was a landlocked city-state on Athas, it had neither a port nor docks. It now looks strangely out of place perched upon the silt basin. In the years since Kalidnay's arrival in the Gray, a small number of adventurous citizens have attempted to build their own silt skimmers or other sailing vessels. Most such efforts end with the vehicles' drivers succumbing to the perils of the silt.

Myriad strange and dangerous creatures live in the silt around Kalidnay—not merely silt horrors and other monsters native to Athas. Nightmarish entities lurking around the city, monsters made as much of death and madness as physical matter, have consumed more than one silt skimmer. Worse, infernal creatures and terrifying undead have attacked those who attempt to leave Kalidnay by silt, almost as if the island is a guarded prison.

The Gorge: At the southern end of Kalidnay, where once a great gorge opened, the city drops abruptly off into the silt basin that surrounds the island. This area, commonly called the Gorge, is too far from the city center to have many inhabitants. It is here where Thakok-An has members of the *kalid-to* dispose of those slain in the arena. As a result of this food source, intermittent though it might be, a number of frightening creatures have made permanent homes in the Gorge. Thakok-An directly feeds some of these silt-dwelling monstrosities when she

needs to do away with anyone who is too dangerous to be set loose in the arena. She sometimes uses these sacrifices to set grisly examples and to demonstrate her power and influence over the dangers of the Gray. In this way, Thakok-An has also secretly earned the allegiance of several intelligent shadow monsters of the silt.

Thakok-An

Thakok-An is the steward of Kalidnay, ruling in Kalid-Ma's stead. She has control over the people, the templars, and the *kalid-to*. However, her ability to maintain that power depends entirely on the idea that she reverently serves Kalid-Ma and intends to restore him to his rightful place as the city's ruler. Over time, Thakok-An has developed a taste for rulership, and she is uncertain how Kalid-Ma might treat her if he ever awakens. She has convinced herself that it's better for Kalidnay if he continues to sleep forever.

Thakok-An **Level 16 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid XP 2,800

HP 304; **Bloodied** 152 **Initiative** +9
AC 30, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 30 **Perception** +14
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 8 damage.

Ego Whip (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +19 vs. Will
Hit: 3d10 + 8 psychic damage, and Thakok-An slides the target up to 3 squares.

Grasp of Kalid-Ma (fear, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +19 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of Thakok-An's next turn.

Mind Link (fear, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** when no creature is dominated by this power
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +19 vs. Will
Hit: 3d12 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is dominated until the end of Thakok-An's next turn. When Thakok-An commands the target to take an action, she can command it to take three (a standard, a move, and a minor action), unless the target is dazed.

Phobia Amplification (fear, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +19 vs. Will
Hit: 3d12 + 5 psychic damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, whenever Thakok-An hits the target with a fear effect, she can use a free action to slide the target up to 3 squares.

Triggered Actions

Arcane Defiling (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An attack roll for *grasp of Kalid-Ma* misses.
Effect (Free Action): Enemies within 3 squares of Thakok-An take 10 necrotic damage, and Thakok-An rerolls the triggering attack roll.

Psionic Augmentation ✦ **Recharge** when Thakok-An takes psychic damage
Trigger: Thakok-An hits an enemy with *ego whip*.
Effect (Free Action): The triggering attack deals 2d10 extra psychic damage.

Skills Arcana +18, Bluff +18, Insight +14, Intimidate +18

Str 10 (+8)	**Dex** 13 (+9)	**Wis** 12 (+9)
Con 16 (+11)	**Int** 20 (+13)	**Cha** 21 (+13)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment templar robes, bone spear

Lore

History DC 30: Thakok-An is a cruel dictator who was once first among all of Kalidnay's templars. Over her years of service, she extolled the sorcerer-king's virtues loudly and often, and she served without fail. She earned a reputation as a merciless and unquestioning servant. Through these merits, as well as cunning and treachery, she eventually worked her way up to Kalid-Ma's side. While doing so, she became obsessed with the sorcerer-king, imagining him as her greatest love.

Even now, Thakok-An refers to herself as Kalid-Ma's queen. Her passion for the sorcerer-king was known inside and outside the city. People in other city-states sincerely referred to her as the Queen of Kalidnay. Despite this popular sobriquet, the sorcerer-king never recognized Thakok-An as his queen before the incident that dropped Kalidnay into the Gray. It is doubtful that he returned her ardor.

Streetwise DC 39: Thakok-An's hold over Kalidnay is dependant on external factors, not the least among them the machinations of the *Orbs of Kalid-Ma*. She retains the vicious streak that served her so well under Kalid-Ma, hurling criminals into the arena and basing distribution of essential supplies on loyalty. However, Thakok-An has been forced to make dark compromises to keep the city in line. The biggest of these is the pact she has made with devils from beyond Kalidnay's island.

Encounters

Thakok-An has few true allies in Kalidnay. Other templars might stand alongside her for a while, but they could abandon her at any sign of weakness. Instead, Thakok-An has come to rely on her own skill, as well as her alliances with the infernal creatures and shadow monsters that she has allowed into the city.

Thakok-An is a frantic fighter, desperate and a little mad. She has spent so much time maintaining the illusion of her great power as Kalid-Ma's consort that she is willing to do almost anything to maintain that deception. This means that, during a

fight, Thakok-An works to punish those who oppose her. She picks off the weakest enemies in the hope of intimidating other foes into fleeing or submitting.

Kalid-Ma

Unknown to Thakok-An, her tampering with Kalid-Ma's ritual actually resulted in his transformation into a dragon. However, the ultimate outcome was something that neither expected, leaving the sorcerer-king in his current condition and creating a legendary artifact.

Lore

History DC 30: Kalid-Ma was once a powerful sorcerer-king and the ruler of the city-state of Kalidnay. At the height of his power, he was at least as powerful as Hamanu of Urik. None of the other sorcerer-kings dared to oppose him. However, most people think Kalid-Ma was destroyed in a mysterious catastrophe, along with the rest of his city-state, some centuries ago.

Arcana DC 39: Although few records of the incident remain, around the time when disaster struck Kalidnay, a mighty dragon swept out of the south, It began laying waste to all in its path. Unlike the Dragon of Tyr, this immense creature seemed to be made partially of living shadow, a being of darkness and defiling magic that flew right out of nightmare.

This dragon was, in fact, Kalid-Ma. When Thakok-An tampered with the sorcerer-king's transformation ritual, the shadow magic she employed indeed hastened the draconic change. Her meddling also shunted all local beings, including Kalid-Ma's human body, into the Gray along with a shadow copy of Kalidnay. As the shadowfall intensified and his material

Kalid-Ma **Level 30 Solo Controller**
Gargantuan shadow magical beast (dragon) XP 95,000

HP 1,120; **Bloodied** 560 **Initiative** see *dragon's actions*
AC 44, **Fortitude** 43, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 44 **Perception** +24
Speed 10, fly 10 (hover) Darkvision
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Dragon's Actions
Kalid-Ma does not roll initiative. He has set initiative counts of 20, 30, and 40, and he takes a turn on each count, although he can still take only one immediate action per round. He cannot delay or ready actions. At the end of any of Kalid-Ma's turns, if he is subject to an effect that would daze, stun, or dominate him, that effect ends.

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 4 (one creature); +35 vs. AC
Hit: 6d8 + 11 damage, and the target loses all necrotic and psychic resistance (save ends).

Crippling Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 4 (one creature); +35 vs. AC
Hit: 6d10 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
Aftereffect: The target is slowed (save ends).

Dragon's Defiling (necrotic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst); +33 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d10 + 6 necrotic damage.

Raking Claws ✦ At-Will
Attack: Close blast 4 (enemies in the blast); +35 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 10 damage, and Kalid-Ma slides the target up to 2 squares.

Defiling Death (necrotic) **✦ Recharge** when Kalid-Ma hits with *dragon's defiling*
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +33 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 6d10 + 7 necrotic damage, and ongoing 20 necrotic damage (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The ongoing necrotic damage increases from 20 to 30.

Breath of Night (force, necrotic) **✦ Encounter**
Requirement: Kalid-Ma must be bloodied.
Attack: Close blast 10 (creatures in the blast); +33 vs. Reflex
Hit: 6d10 + 3 force and necrotic damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).
Miss: Half damage.

Kalid-Ma's Corruption (necrotic) **✦ Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst); +33 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 6d10 + 5 necrotic damage, the target cannot regain hit points until the end of Kalid-Ma's next turn, and Kalid-Ma pushes the target up to 5 squares.
Miss: Half damage, and Kalid-Ma pushes the target up to 3 squares.

Move Actions

Pass Through the Gray (teleportation) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: Kalid-Ma teleports up to 5 squares, and he can also teleport any creature adjacent to him before the teleport to an unoccupied square adjacent to his new space.

Minor Actions

Change Shape (polymorph) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: Kalid-Ma alters his physical form to appear as a unique Medium human (his own human form) until he attacks, ends the effect as a minor action, or drops to 0 hit points.

Triggered Actions

Lashing Tail ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy ends its movement within 4 squares of Kalid-Ma.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 4 (triggering enemy); +35 vs. Reflex
Hit: 6d8 + 11 damage, and Kalid-Ma knocks the target prone.

Bloodied Pulse ✦ Encounter
Trigger: Kalid-Ma is first bloodied.
Effect (Free Action): Kalid-Ma's corruption recharges, and Kalid-Ma uses it.

Str 29 (+24)	**Dex** 28 (+24)	**Wis** 28 (+24)
Con 32 (+26)	**Int** 23 (+21)	**Cha** 35 (+27)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Supernal

form went into the Gray, Kalid-Ma's dark emotions, darker spirit, and the shadow magic of Thakok-An's spells combined. The sorcerer-king became a dragon of spirit and shadow, absent all reason, in the natural world.

For weeks, the insane Kalid-Ma rampaged across Athas until Kalak of Tyr, Hamanu of Urik, and Borys of Ebe combined their forces to slay him. However, unknown to the sorcerer-kings, Kalid-Ma was not fully defeated. Since Kalid-Ma's physical body had been dragged into the Gray, the death of his dragon form failed to put an end to his existence. Instead, his consciousness became trapped in a multipart artifact known as the *Orbs of Kalid-Ma*.

Encounters

Kalid-Ma can awaken only if someone reunites all the *Orbs of Kalid-Ma*. If this happens near shadow Kalidnay, the forces of Kalidnay are sure to accompany their master. (Whether Kalid-Ma destroys Thakok-An for her transgressions depends entirely on her ample guile.) Kalid-Ma's mastery of magic makes it possible for him to transport himself and his followers from the Gray to the world. If the sorcerer-king is reborn, he is apt to arrive in Athas already on the road to war. In this situation, he will focus on those who slew his original dragon form, starting with Kalak. Learning of Kalak's demise is unlikely to prevent Kalid-Ma's assault on Tyr.

Kalid-Ma is a force of pure destruction. The first time he transformed into a shadow-tainted dragon, he went on a rampage. If resurrected, he has more control over his actions. However, he employs his powers without regard to possible collateral damage. Further, he uses threats against innocents to distract heroic fools. Against Tyr, Kalid-Ma's aim is utter annihilation, although learning of Kalak's death might cause him to spare the city for one of his followers to rule. Urik could escape with less damage, becoming Kalid-Ma's new throne city. The dragon-king might grant Urik to Thakok-An or another devotee before he leaves to take on the Dragon of Tyr, intending to become the ultimate master of Athas.

The Orbs of Kalid-Ma

The *Orbs of Kalid-Ma* are five obsidian spheres the sorcerer-king used in the ritual to transform himself into a defiler dragon. However, since Thakok-An's intervention corrupted that ritual, the orbs became so much more. Now they are vessels for the splintered consciousness of Kalid-Ma. In fact, the only reason that Kalid-Ma was not killed outright, and why his body sleeps in Kalidnay to this day, is because his mind became trapped within the *Orbs of Kalid-Ma*. The five orbs now seek to be reunited so Kalid-Ma can return to Athas.

When Kalidnay fell into the Gray, the five obsidian spheres remained on Athas. Successful looters, unaware of what they had found, took the orbs from the ziggurat in ruined Kalidnay and sold them. Now they are scattered across the Tyr Region. They have all but vanished from history, surfacing only in rare wild tales or historic accounts.

Laylon-Ka, the House Vordon lich in Kalidnay, has one of the *Orbs of Kalid-Ma* in her clutches. Hamanu is believed to have another. Unknown to all but a few dray, Absalom holds a third orb deep within Giustenal. The whereabouts of the other two are a mystery, although a dark rumor indicates such an obsidian sphere has been seen within Kalak's ziggurat.

Each orb is an artifact of great psychic and arcane power. A wielder of one of these obsidian spheres possesses a significant edge over any enemy. But an owner also feels an overwhelming obsession to find the other orbs.

Orb of Kalid-Ma **Paragon Level**

This obsidian sphere's reflective surface sometimes shows scenes of draconic transformations or images of the current location of others of its kind.

Artifact: Implement (orb)
Enhancement: +4 to attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +4d10 psychic damage
Property: You gain a +4 bonus to AC against ranged weapon attacks.
Property: You gain a +4 bonus to saving throws against the dominated condition.
Power (Daily): Minor Action. *Effect*: You regain 6 psionic power points.
Power (Daily): Minor Action. *Effect*: You regain the use of one expended encounter or daily attack power that has the arcane or the psionic keyword.
Power (At-Will): Minor Action. *Requirement*: One *Orb of Kalid-Ma* must be touching another. *Effect*: The two orbs meld into one. If all five orbs have been combined in this fashion, Kalid-Ma is resurrected and appears in the nearest unoccupied space.

Goals of the Orbs of Kalid-Ma

- To be reunited with all the other *Orbs of Kalid-Ma*, restoring Kalid-Ma's mind to his body.
- To oppose the efforts of the Dragon of Tyr, Hamanu, Kalak, and King Tithian, Kalak's replacement.
- To destroy the Dragon of Tyr.
- To travel to shadow Kalidnay and find Thakok-An, possibly punishing her for her failure.

Roleplaying an Orb of Kalid-Ma

Each of the *Orbs of Kalid-Ma* lacks a complete personality, but does possess enough of Kalid-Ma's mind to have purpose and will. An orb gives its wielder delusions of grandeur and invincibility. A person in possession of an orb also feels a strong compulsion to cast aside former interests to dedicate all time and effort to psionic and arcane studies. Every orb wishes for a wielder that is a master of psionics or arcane magic. Such a mystic is better equipped to reunite all five orbs.

Concordance

The *Orbs of Kalid-Ma* are unlike other artifacts, in that they do not respond to the growing power of their wielder. Instead, *Orbs of Kalid-Ma* seek out those who bring them closer to each other, and they reward anyone who takes steps toward restoring Kalid-Ma's mind.

Starting Score	5
Owner takes the orb to Kalidnay	+5
Owner melds another *Orb of Kalid-Ma*	+5
Owner has the templar theme	+2
Owner has psionic power points	+2
Owner uses *arcane defiling* (1/day)	+1
Owner ends a day without having used the orb as an implement	-2
Owner acts against Kalidnay's interests	-2

Pleased (16–20)

"I hear the voice of Kalid-Ma."

The *Orb of Kalid-Ma* seeks to reward the wielder for his or her efforts in restoring Kalid-Ma to life. It shows frequent scenes of Kalid-Ma and Kalidnay before the catastrophe, giving the user visions of Kalid-Ma's glory days.

Property: Whenever you make an attack that has the psychic keyword, you can score a critical hit on a roll of 19–20.

Power (Daily): Standard Action. *Effect*: You and all allies within 10 squares of you can instantly travel to the outskirts of either ruined Kalidnay or shadow Kalidnay.

Satisfied (12–15)

"A dragon waits to escape from this orb. I can feel it."

The wielder has likely taken some small steps toward restoring Kalid-Ma to his rightful place, but more can be done. Sometimes the orb quivers as though a creature inside is trying to hatch.

Property: You are immune to psychic damage.

Power (Daily ✦ Necrotic, Psychic): Minor Action. *Effect*: Each enemy adjacent to you takes 20 necrotic and psychic damage.

Normal (5–11)

"This orb is one of five, and each is more powerful when bound to another."

The *Orb of Kalid-Ma* waits and watches, offering neither positive nor negative feedback.

Unsatisfied (1–4)

"Does anybody else hear that whispering?"

The orb is openly displeased with its owner. Mental defenses it once provided begin to fade, opening weak spots in the wielder's mind.

Property: You gain vulnerable 5 psychic, and you lose psychic resistance you have from any other source.

Property: Whenever you roll a natural 1 on any attack roll you make using the *Orb of Kalid-Ma*, you grant combat advantage (save ends).

Angered (0 or Lower)

"It erodes my mind. Soon, nothing will be left of me."

The orb knows that its wielder is not going to accomplish what all orbs desire. It actively tries to pass into the hands of another.

Property: You gain vulnerable 10 psychic, and you lose psychic resistance you have from any other source.

Property: Whenever you roll a natural 1 on any attack roll you make using the *Orb of Kalid-Ma*, you become dazed (save ends).

Moving On

"The orbs seek each other, like kin lost in the desert."

An *Orb of Kalid-Ma* can move on in one of two ways. Either the orb seeks out another who is more willing to reunite the orbs and restore Kalid-Ma, or the wielder melds all five *Orbs of Kalid-Ma*. In the second case, the shadow-tainted sorcerer-king is reborn in all his magnificence. What he might do with or to his savior is anyone's guess.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include *Monster Manual® 3*, the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands™*, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms™*, and *Monster Vault™*.

Force of Nature

A D&D® adventure for characters of levels 9-11

By Kolja Raven Liquette

Introduction

"Force of Nature" takes place in and around the village of Elkridge, which is threatened by yuan-ti and a colossus from the Feywild called a sovereign elk. The heroes must determine how to stop this archfey creature, negotiate the Feywild breach through which the sovereign elk emerged, and figure out why it marches toward the Stormbolt Highlands.

This Dungeons & Dragons® adventure is designed for characters of levels 9–11. The village of Elkridge and the surrounding area have previously appeared in "Remains of the Empire" (*Dungeon* 165) and "The Tyrant's Oath" (*Dungeon* 178). These locations can be dropped into any campaign setting.

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Adventure Background

The village of Elkridge is located in a remote valley protected by a warlord named Skarn Felstorm and her militia, who inhabit a fortress in the nearby Stormbolt Highlands. Near the fortress is a copper and iron mine vital to Elkridge's prosperity; the smelted ore is sold to Elkridge's artisans and forged into high-quality goods that are sold in distant cities.

While digging for ore, miners excavated a wall of cold iron etched with arcane runes. Although the wall was impenetrable and seemingly impervious to their tools, striking it suggested the existence of a cavity beyond. No sooner was this discovery made when a disembodied voice, ranting about the end of times to be heralded by a hitherto unknown power, caused the workers to fight among themselves. Not long afterward, tremors began to shake the valley at sporadic intervals. The villagers of Elkridge mistook these tremors for natural earthquakes, but the truth is far worse.

The rune-etched wall is part of a magical prison buried long ago. Trapped inside is a powerful (and seemingly immortal) naga exarch of Zehir that longs to be free. Escaping from its cold iron prison is no simple matter; the naga has made telepathic contact with several yuan-ti in the valley and set them toward building a device that will summon a force of nature great enough to sunder the walls of the prison.

LEY LINES

Ley lines (see *Manual of the Planes*) are invisible veins of arcane energy that flow through the lands of the Feywild. Locations where two or more ley lines overlap often have fey crossings that enable creatures to move between the Feywild and the natural world.

Ley lines are by no means restricted to the Feywild. They are present—albeit more spread out and harder to detect—in the natural world as well.

Adventure Synopsis

The adventure begins with a powerful earth tremor and a wave of concussive force that ripples through the forest. Characters trace the source to an ancient shrine where three ley lines converge (see the "Ley Lines" sidebar). Yuan-ti have constructed six summoning beacons around this location and used them to summon forth a gargantuan elk that erupts from the ground, leaving behind a gaping rift to the Feywild. The sovereign elk lumbers toward the village of Elkridge, leaving shattered trees and a trail of knotted roots in its wake.

Characters can redirect the sovereign elk away from inhabited areas but are unable to harm it. The Elkridge militia arrives to harry the colossus, thus freeing the heroes to find another way to halt the elk's advance.

If the adventurers follow a ley line into the Stormbolt Highlands, they discover that it intersects with a mysterious rune-etched wall recently excavated by Skarn Felstorm's miners. If they follow the ley line in the opposite direction and step through the gaping rift left by the sovereign elk, they are transported to an isolated valley in the Feywild. Following an obvious trail of destruction leads the adventurers to a damaged eladrin and elf stronghold situated where the Stormbolt Highlands would be located in the natural world. If the heroes convince the eladrin and the elves that they share a common enemy, they are welcomed into the stronghold.

The eladrin and the elves reveal that the sovereign elk is a beloved archfey, and they are eager to help the heroes lure it back into the Feywild. The heroes also learn that the sovereign elk is being used as a pawn to free a powerful naga exarch of Zehir trapped in a magical prison that Skarn's miners accidentally unearthed. The heroes are given a vial of the sovereign elk's blood that must be imbibed before they confront the archfey in the Stormbolt Highlands.

The Stormbolt Highlands militia, powerless to stop the sovereign elk, tries to steer it away from populated areas as it advances slowly toward the mine, drawn to something trapped behind the rune-etched wall. Meanwhile, a force of yuan-ti and snaketongue cultists confronts the Stormbolt Highlands militia.

The characters must figure out how to gain control of the sovereign elk before it reaches the cold iron prison buried below Skarn's fortress. If they fail, the elk destroys the fortress and the mine before freeing the naga. If they succeed, they can guide the sovereign elk back through the Feywild rift and end the destruction.

Getting the Heroes Involved

Here are two ways the characters might become involved in the story.

- The adventurers hear reports of tremors in the region of Elkridge. At the same time, there has been a sudden drop-off in trade with the Stormbolt Highlands. This could have something to do with the tremors or with recent sightings of yuan-ti skulking about the area.
- The heroes are passing through the region or heading to Elkridge when a tremor strikes, kicking off the adventure.

Events

This adventure consists of a series of event-based encounters. The events are presented in the order in which they're most likely to occur. Feel free to adjust the order as needs dictate.

Event 1. On Shaky Ground

Roleplaying Encounter

Whether the adventurers are heading to Elkridge or simply passing through the outlying area, read or paraphrase the following.

The forest forms a shelter over the road. A dwarf peasant approaches from the opposite direction on foot and calls out, "Hail, friends!" No sooner are these words spoken when the ground shudders beneath your feet. As the tremor intensifies, a sudden shock wave threatens to knock you flat.

Have each character and the villager make a saving throw to avoid falling prone. (Dwarves gain a +5 bonus due to their Stand Your Ground racial trait.)

Once the tremor subsides and the heroes regain their footing, characters notice (without having to make a check) that the surrounding flora has become more lush in the wake of the magical shock wave, and there's new plant growth everywhere. A successful DC 17 Arcana or Nature check suggests that the shock wave is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but a magical one. A character who succeeds on a DC 25 Arcana check senses an undercurrent of magic flowing through the region, suggesting the presence of one or more ley lines. Following a ley line in the natural world takes concentration and requires a successful DC 25 Arcana check once every hour.

The villager—a middle-aged dwarf named Sylus Ironshoe—tells the adventurers that the tremors and shock waves started a few days ago and are becoming more frequent and intense. He doesn't know their cause. He thinks they might be worse the closer one gets to Elkridge, which is why he's staying with friends at an outlying farm.

If the characters haven't been to Elkridge before, Sylus is happy to point the way. If they express interest in learning more about the quakes and shock waves, he suggests they confer with Vlayn Felstorm, the leader of the village (and Skarn Felstorm's mother).

In order to find the origin point of the shock waves, the characters must experience at least two more such events, after which they can make a DC 25 Nature check. Any character succeeding on the check can pinpoint the epicenter (see Event 2).

Development

The characters can continue to the village of Elkridge. Upon their arrival, they experience their second quake and accompanying shock wave.

Villagers who recognize them from earlier adventures readily answer any questions. The villagers can otherwise be canvassed with a DC 12 Diplomacy or Streetwise check. In either case, they confirm that the tremors have been strongest near Elkridge. Any character who begins talking about ley lines is directed to the village leader, Vlayn Felstorm, a middle-aged female human and the leader of Elkridge. Vlayn reveals that Elkridge sits near a convergence of three ley lines, which might explain why the tremors and shock waves are felt more strongly here than in outlying areas.

If the characters ask Vlayn why she hasn't evacuated Elkridge, she tells them that the local militia has spotted yuan-ti interlopers in the surrounding wilderness. She refuses to abandon the village and allow the evil serpentfolk to gain a foothold. Characters who surmise that the yuan-ti are behind the quakes are correct, but Vlayn can neither confirm nor deny this speculation.

After spending a day in Elkridge, the heroes experience their third shock wave and can make a DC 25 Nature check to pinpoint its epicenter. Otherwise, they can make Arcana checks to follow ley lines until they happen upon the epicenter. Either way, proceed with Event 2.

Event 2. Hidden Crossroads

Combat Encounter Level 11 (3,100 XP)

If the heroes follow the correct ley line or pinpoint the origin of the shock wave, they are led through a dense forest to a clearing where three ley lines converge. A group of yuan-ti cabalists and their snaketongue adherents are using this location to summon a powerful archfey from the Feywild, and their efforts are causing widespread tremors.

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night (torches).

Monsters: 5 yuan-ti cabalists, 5 snaketongue adherents.

When the characters reach the clearing, read:

You come upon a naturally formed basin hidden in the forest. Several large trees have been cut down and removed to clear the area. Growing around the broad stumps are thick briar scrubs. In the middle of the basin stands a domed shrine, dilapidated and ruined with age. A covenant of scaly humanoids and half-humanoid, half-snake creatures gather around it, and arranged about the shrine are six squat stone obelisks covered with pulsating, serpentine sigils.

A character who succeeds on a DC 25 Arcana check senses the convergence of multiple ley lines in the area and can determine that the yuan-ti obelisks are somehow tapping into that intense magical energy.

Characters hoping to gain surprise or to study the obelisks and the shrine more closely can enter the basin unnoticed by making a DC 22 Stealth check. (If multiple characters are moving together, have them make a group Stealth check instead.)

Ancient Shrine: This structure is built atop the convergence of ley lines and consists of a cracked dome supported by five 10-foot-tall stone pillars. The shrine provides partial cover and can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

A successful DC 17 History check affirms that the shrine was built by eladrin roughly two hundred years ago. Closer inspection of the structure reveals Elven script carved into its walls; the script translates to "A bridge without a bridge," suggesting that the eladrin once used the shrine as a fey crossing to move between the Feywild and the natural world.

The shrine can be pushed over with a DC 25 Strength check. Any creature underneath the structure when it collapses takes 3d6 + 15 damage, falls prone, and is restrained by rubble (escape DC 17).

5 Yuan-Ti Cabalists (C)	Level 9 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 400 each
HP 100; **Bloodied** 50	**Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20	**Perception** +7
Speed 7	
Resist 10 poison	
Traits	
☼ **Whipping Tail** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura is slowed until the start of its next turn.	
Standard Actions	
⨾ **Venomite Pick** (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage plus 5 poison damage.	
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the yuan-ti's next turn.	
➢ **Snakebite Crossbow** (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
Skills Arcana +13, Nature +12, Thievery +11	
Str 22 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+7)	
Con 20 (+9) **Int** 18 (+8) **Cha** 12 (+5)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic	
Equipment war pick, crossbow, 10 bolts	

5 Snaketongue Adherents (A)	Level 9 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 100 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +11
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 18	**Perception** +11
Speed 6	
Resist 5 poison	
Traits	
Slippery	
Any immobilized, marked, or slowed effects on the snaketongue adherent end at the start of its turn.	
Standard Actions	
⨾ **Scimitar** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 8 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Curse of Zehir ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: An enemy kills the snaketongue adherent.	
Effect (No Action): The triggering enemy gains vulnerable 5 poison until the end of the encounter.	
Str 18 (+8) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 15 (+6)	
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 11 (+4) **Cha** 10 (+4)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic	
Equipment hide armor, scimitar	

Obelisks: Each of the six obelisks stands 4 feet tall and weighs 500 pounds. A DC 18 Arcana check reveals that the obelisks are summoning devices designed to harness the raw power of the three converging ley lines in order to open a rift between the natural world and the Feywild. If the characters try to deactivate or destroy the obelisks, see "The Obelisks" below.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: The snaketongue adherents are more likely to detect the characters' approach than are the yuan-ti cabalists, especially if it's nighttime and the heroes carry light sources and make no attempt at subterfuge. In this event, they alert the cabalists and take up defensive positions behind tree stumps (which provide partial cover).

The obelisks are fully attuned to one another, which means the yuan-ti can open the rift to the Feywild whenever they want. They were waiting for a sign from their liege—the imprisoned naga exarch of Zehir that speaks to them in their dreams. However, the heroes' arrival forces their hand. If three or more yuan-ti cabalists fall in battle, the remaining two hack at the obelisks with their blades in an attempt to destroy the devices and open the rift (see Event 3).

The Obelisks

A character adjacent to an obelisk can deactivate it with a DC 25 Arcana check or Thievery check. Failing the skill check by 5 or more causes the obelisk to self-destruct and explode in a close burst 1, dealing 2d6 + 10 damage to all creatures in the burst. Dealing 20 damage or more to an obelisk (AC 23, Fortitude 20, Reflex 5, Will –) with a single attack destroys it and has the same explosive effect. Because the obelisks are magically connected, destroying one of them causes all other obelisks in the basin to explode as well.

Characters who study an obelisk closely (from within 2 squares) and succeed on a DC 18 Arcana check realize that all six obelisks are magically entwined and highly unstable, such that destroying one might cause all of them to explode.

Deactivating the Obelisks: If the heroes deactivate all six obelisks without destroying any of them, the yuan-ti are thwarted and the earthquakes cease. Any surviving yuan-ti and snaketongue adherents scatter into the woods. Driven by the whispered dreams of the naga exarch of Zehir, the yuan-ti return in greater numbers with more obelisks to finish what they started. In a matter of days, the earthquakes return, and the threat begins anew.

Destroying the Obelisks: If the obelisks are destroyed, the ground shakes and the shrine (if it's still standing) begins to crack and fall apart. As the shrine collapses, a thunderous boom resounds from deep underground and causes the entire basin to shudder as the ground opens up and a rift to the Feywild is formed.

Magic Rift Explosion Terrain	**Level 11 Hazard** XP 600
Detect –	**Initiative** –
Immune attacks	

Triggered Actions

Trigger: The yuan-ti obelisks are destroyed.

Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 10 centered on the ancient shrine (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d10 + 12 damage, and the target is pushed to the nearest square outside the burst, falls prone, and is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Miss: Half damage, and the target is pushed to the nearest square outside the burst and falls prone.

Effect: A 45-foot-diameter hole fills the space where the ancient shrine used to stand. Tendrils of arcane energy rise from this jagged rift; see Event 5 for details.

Countermeasures

✦ For each obelisk that was deactivated (see Event 2), reduce the burst radius by 1.

Difficult Terrain

This encounter features three kinds of difficult terrain.

Briar Scrub: Dealing 15 or more damage to a square of briar scrub (AC 20, Fortitude 20, Reflex 5, Will –) clears it.

Tree Stumps: These obstacles grant partial cover to creatures crouched behind them.

Rubble: Pieces of the shrine that have fallen off the main structure are difficult terrain where they lie on the ground.

Event 3. The Sovereign Elk

Skill-Based Encounter Level 11 (3,000 XP)

The destruction of the yuan-ti obelisks in Event 2 opens a magical rift between the natural world and the Feywild and also summons forth a gargantuan sovereign elk. This archfey is the key to the evil exarch's escape from its cold iron prison.

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night (torches).

Monsters: Sovereign elk.

When the rift explosion has subsided, read:

Your eyes behold an impossible sight: A gargantuan elk climbs out of the arcane rift, with antlers that stretch above the forest canopy. The creature snorts a blast of hot air and proceeds to walk out of the basin toward Elkridge. The great elk shakes its powerful horns and instantly reduces the trees in its path to splinters, raining down fragments of shattered timber. As the creature sunders a path through the forest, a trail of gnarled roots spontaneously grows out of the trampled forest floor. Only now does your focus shift to the breach from which the elk emerged. The gaping maw, 45 feet across, spews arcane energy. Thorny tendrils creep out of the rift and begin to blanket the entire basin with aggressive briars.

If the characters take more of an interest in the rift than in the sovereign elk, skip to Event 5.

A DC 15 Arcana check identifies the gargantuan elk as a unique archfey creature. If any of the yuan-ti cabalists or snaketongue adherents survived the formation of the rift, they chase after the sovereign elk and attack any characters who follow the creature.

Treasure: None.

Sovereign Elk — **Level 11 Solo Brute**
Gargantuan fey magical beast — XP 3,000

HP 576; **Bloodied** 288 — **Initiative** +9
AC 23, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 21 — **Perception** +13
Speed 7 — Low-light vision
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Natural Regeneration
While in the natural world, the sovereign elk regains all its hit points whenever it starts its turn and has at least 1 hit point.

Relentless Stride
The sovereign elk cannot be immobilized, restrained, slowed, or knocked prone. It is immune to forced movement and ignores difficult and challenging terrain.

Standard Actions

Hoof ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +14 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone. If the target is already prone, it is dazed until the end of the sovereign elk's next turn.

Double Attack ✦ At-Will
Effect: The sovereign elk uses *hoof* twice.

Sweeping Antlers ✦ At-Will
Attack: Close blast 4 (creatures in the blast); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 10 damage, and the sovereign elk slides the target up to 4 squares and knocks it prone.
Miss: Half damage, and the sovereign elk slides the target up to 2 squares.

Move Actions

Trample ✦ Recharge ⚀ ⚁ ⚂
Effect: The sovereign elk can move up to its speed and enter enemy spaces. Each time it enters an enemy space for the first time during the move, the sovereign elk uses *hoof* against that enemy.

Minor Actions

Vigorous Shake ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Effect: Each creature grabbing or riding the sovereign elk must make a DC 19 Acrobatics or Athletics check (creature's choice). On a failure, the creature loses its hold on the elk and falls, landing in a square adjacent to the elk.

Skills Athletics +18

Str 27 (+13)	**Dex** 18 (+9)	**Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 24 (+12)	**Int** 6 (+3)	**Cha** 19 (+9)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** –

Tactics: The sovereign elk has one overriding impulse—to reach the Stormbolt Highlands. It marches northeast, following the ley line that passes through Elkridge, and isn't easily swayed from its course. The creature destroys anything that stands in its way, including the cottages of Elkridge that lie in its path.

If the heroes approach the archfey from behind, they must negotiate difficult terrain caused by the gnarled roots that grow in the archfey's wake. Approaching the sovereign elk from either side is safest. However, the characters will quickly realize that physical attacks are ineffectual against the sovereign elk because of its incredible regenerative ability in the natural world.

ARCHFEY LORE

A character knows the following information about archfey with a successful Arcana check.

DC 15: Archfey are powerful avatars that represent aspects of nature.

DC 20: Archfey include powerful immortal beings such as Baba Yaga, the Prince of Frost, and the Summer Queen. They also take the form of mighty beasts.

DC 25: Archfey beasts are slightly more intelligent than common beasts. They are forces of nature, neither good nor evil, that cannot be reasoned with.

Difficult Terrain

This encounter features two kinds of difficult terrain.

Gnarled Roots: Wherever the sovereign elk walks, a trail of gnarled roots 4 squares across immediately sprouts up from the earth behind it. These roots become fully grown fey-touched trees in 1 month.

Shattered Trees: The sovereign elk destroys trees in its path, using its antlers and hooves.

The Cottage

If the characters follow the sovereign elk, they spot a cottage in the distance, a thin plume of smoke rising from its chimney. The structure is still a distance off but directly in the elk's path. If the elk can be diverted a few feet to the left or right (see "Riding the Elk" below), the cottage and its dwellers might be spared.

When the sovereign elk moves, it does so at its normal speed; it does not run. Characters can run ahead to warn the cottage occupants (a married human couple, their two children, the family dog, and the children's sick grandmother).

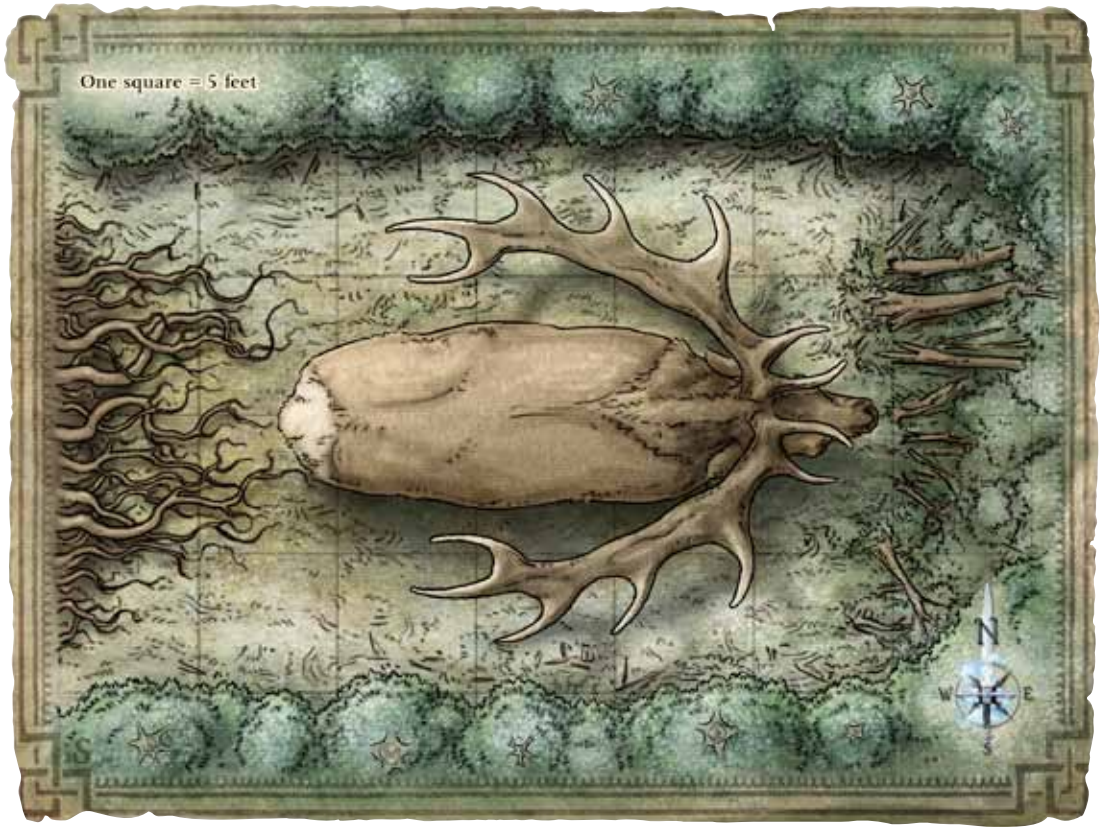
Treasure: If a character carries the sick grandmother to safety, she removes a pendant from around her neck and gives it to her savior. The pendant is a *sun globe* (*Adventurer's Vault 2*).

Riding the Elk

If it is not redirected, the sovereign elk destroys the cottage and many more beyond. In order to redirect the beast, the characters must first mount it.

The sovereign elk is 30 feet tall at the withers, 50 feet at the highest point of its antlers. Characters can adjust the sovereign elk's course slightly using skill checks.

Climbing the Elk: Before a character can climb the sovereign elk, he or she must successfully grab the beast. When the elk moves, it pulls all creatures grabbing it a number of squares equal to its speed.



A character grabbing the sovereign elk can climb the beast by making a DC 19 Athletics check. If this check fails by 5 or more, the character falls, landing in the nearest unoccupied space.

Leaping onto the Elk: A character can leap down upon the sovereign elk from a nearby tree or promontory. This stunt requires a DC 23 Acrobatics check followed by a successful grab attack. If either the check or the attack fails, the character falls, landing in a random space adjacent to the beast.

Teleporting onto the Elk: A character who teleports onto the elk's back must succeed on a DC 19 Acrobatics check or fall off the beast, landing in a random adjacent space.

Steering the Elk

A character riding the sovereign elk can climb up one of its antlers to create an imbalance in weight to that side. Doing this requires a DC 19 Athletics check. If the check fails by 5 or more, the character falls from a height of 40 feet and lands in a square adjacent to the elk. If the check succeeds, the elk turns its head

toward the heavier side, alters its course in that direction at the start of its next turn, and continues on that new trajectory until the end of its turn. On its turn, it uses *vigorous shake*.

Characters might devise other clever ways to steer or control the sovereign elk. For instance, the elk can be dominated, at least for a short time. Ingenious characters might construct elaborate snares to slow or halt the beast's advance. The elk is smart enough to avoid obvious traps such as open pits, and its antlers and hooves effortlessly cut through ropes. However, if the players concoct some clever plan to trap the elk, find a way to reward them while making it clear that the best they can do is to stall the archfey.

Vlayn's Arrival

If the adventurers elect not to interfere with the sovereign elk, Vlayn Felstorm arrives on the back of a warwing drake. She asks the heroes for assistance.

"The militia is being recalled, but I fear it might be too late. There's no telling how much destruction this colossus will visit on Elkridge. I know it's asking a lot, but your company seems able-bodied. Is there anything you can do to steer this creature away? Our village would be greatly in your debt."

Rewards

If the characters find a reliable method of steering the sovereign elk, they can prevent any more cottages from being destroyed and receive experience points for defeating the archfey. They cannot, however, keep the sovereign elk from marching toward the Stormbolt Highlands. The sovereign elk always tries to resume its original course after being guided around an obstacle.

Event 4. Felstorm's Quest

Roleplaying Encounter

The Elkridge militia responds to the sovereign elk's arrival in the natural world. Skarn Felstorm, warlord of the Stormbolt Highlands, appears astride a warwing drake, her militia following close behind on horseback. (If they become necessary, statistics and background information for Skarn and her warwing drake can be found in "The Tyrant's Oath," *Dungeon* 178.)

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night (moonlight or torches).

When Skarn arrives, read:

A winged drake with bright orange scales and a spike-lined tail flies overhead, its rider clad in gleaming scale armor. The dragon lands nearby, and the rider dismounts. As she removes her helm, long black hair tumbles down over her shoulders.

Suddenly your eyes are drawn to the woods, through which comes a host of armored soldiers on horseback, their tunics emblazoned with the crest of Elkridge. The local militia has arrived in force.

If the characters are meeting Skarn for the first time, she introduces herself as Skarn Felstorm, Lord-Protector of Elkridge and head of the local militia, as well as the daughter of Vlayn Felstorm, the village leader. If the heroes were previously introduced to Skarn in "The Tyrant's Oath," she cuts to the chase.

Skarn and the dozen horse-riding soldiers accompanying her are aware of the explosion at the ancient shrine but mystified by the appearance of the giant elk. If the party explains that the yuan-ti were responsible for summoning the elk, Skarn assumes that the elk is part of a new yuan-ti plot to destroy Elkridge and lay claim to the valley. Although she's aware that local miners recently unearthed something of interest in the mines near her fortress, Skarn has no inkling that their discovery has anything to do with the sovereign elk.

Skarn gives the party a mission: While her troops do their utmost to slow the sovereign elk's advance, the adventurers must find a way to drive the archfey back to the plane whence it came.

If the characters are uncertain how to proceed, Skarn suggests they learn more about the sovereign elk by investigating the rift through which it emerged; if the heroes head back to the rift, proceed with Event 5.

Treasure: If the adventurers accept Skarn's mission, she promises them a generous parcel of land (roughly five acres) near the village of Elkridge. The land is worth 1,500 gp.

Roleplaying Skarn

Exiled by her father, Lord-Protector Arlen Firestorm, Skarn returned to Elkridge after her father's death to defend the valley against a growing yuan-ti threat. However, her intentions were far from noble; she demanded tribute in exchange for protection, and many locals considered her nothing more than a bandit and a would-be tyrant. Over time, she began to take her role more seriously, and eventually she won enough victories against the yuan-ti to earn the locals' trust. She was only recently awarded her father's mantle as Lord-Protector, and many of the bandits who once served her now form the backbone of Elkridge's militia, defending the village and environs from the unending yuan-ti threat.

Skarn is a beautiful, dignified woman with a sharp wit and a no-nonsense manner. She asks a lot of the men under her command and expects total obedience, but she is kind to those who treat her and the citizens of Elkridge with respect. Her hatred of the yuan-ti runs deep, but even so, ridding the valley of their presence has proved to be no easy task. Although frequent militia patrols make it difficult for the yuan-ti to travel outside Nettleblight Swamp (in the northeast corner of the valley), the devious snakefolk almost always find ways to avoid death or capture. This annoys her greatly, but she's not so proud that she won't ask for assistance from adventurers; she fancied herself an adventurer at one time, and she's wise enough to know that hired mercenaries have their uses.

WARWING DRAKE LORE

A character knows the following information about warwing drakes with a successful Nature check.

DC 15: Warwing drakes are easily trained as aerial mounts.

DC 20: Warwing drakes cannot speak but understand spoken Draconic. They were originally bred by dragonborn to serve as flying mounts.

Event 5. The Feywild Rift

Combat Encounter Level 10 (2,500 XP)

After the rift forms, the adventurers have the option of exploring it or chasing after the sovereign elk. If they choose the latter course of action, events conspire to return them to the rift. The rift leads to the Feywild and is currently inhabited by an evil fey creature that took residence in the rift after it was formed.

Light: Bright light during the day (sunlight), dim light at night (tendrils of energy issuing from the rift and motes of light inside the rift).

Monsters: Briar troll.

When the characters examine the rift, read:
The air in and around the rift is filled with sharp odors ranging from cracked tree bark and heady spring flowers to rain-soaked grass and sweet, dripping sap. All these smells are carried on the powerful torrent of energy that issues from the yawning orifice.

Closer inspection reveals that the rift plunges deep, passing through layers of clay, rock, and sediment to form a vertical tunnel. The tunnel walls are covered in thorny briars, and within the energy-lit depths, countless motes of light float aimlessly.

The energy issuing from the rift is harmless to living creatures. However, any undead creature inside the rift takes 5 damage at the start of its turn.

Scaling the Rift: What becomes readily apparent to anyone who enters the rift is that gravity is reversed: What looked like a treacherous descent is actually a daunting ascent. Scaling the rift requires a DC 15 Athletics check or Dungeoneering check; a character using Athletics is relying on handholds and clutching onto briars, whereas a character using Dungeoneering navigates the many ledges and natural footholds. A creature that fails a skill check by 5 or more takes 5 damage from the thorny briars.

Motes of Light: As creatures make their way through the rift, the tiny motes of light that fill the shaft follow them. A DC 18 Insight check or Perception check reveals that the motes of light are diminutive flying creatures, each one no larger or smarter than a moth. Sudden movement startles them.

A mote of light produces the same amount of illumination as a candle and has a fly speed of 6. It can share a space with any creature, cannot attack or flank, and cannot be damaged or targeted by attacks. However, a creature can try to catch one by making a DC 20 Dexterity check as a standard action. If the check succeeds, the mote disappears, and the creature gains a fly speed of 6 for as long as it remains in the rift tunnel.

Den of the Briar Troll: After 30 feet, the passage is choked with roots. The tangled roots fill the tunnel to a depth of 100 feet (20 squares), and they quickly grow back when hacked away or damaged. Creatures need not make skill checks to navigate them, since the roots provide ample handholds and are quite stable. In addition, creatures amid the roots gain partial cover.

Within the tangle of roots is a hungry briar troll that entered the rift from the Feywild side shortly after it formed. Characters within 5 squares of the troll automatically see it, even though its skin color and texture allow it to blend with its surroundings (it's surrounded by four swirling motes of light).

The Briar Troll

When the adventurers first spot the troll, read:
A large humanoid with gangly arms, its green flesh covered with brambles and thorns, lurks behind a thick cluster of

roots. Four motes of light similar to those seen throughout the rift swirl around the creature. It appears to be a strange offshoot of troll.

In addition to gaining a fly speed of 6 from a mote of light it has caught, the troll has learned how to draw upon the magic of the motes for protection; as a minor action once per round, it can devour one of its four motes of light and gain either resist 10 to untyped damage until the end of its next turn or remove one effect or condition currently afflicting it. (Characters who try to swallow motes of light do not gain such benefits. The light meal makes them feel only a touch queasy.) Once it has consumed all four motes, the briar troll can no longer use this power.

Treasure: The troll carries a level 13 uncommon or rare magic item and a level 12 uncommon magic item in a sack tied about its waist.

Tactics: The troll relies on the motes of light (see above) and its regeneration for protection while it rends enemies with its claws or crushes them with its *feyroot snare*. It saves *grasping brambles* for particularly elusive prey, pulling grabbed enemies into its *brambly flesh* aura.

Briar Troll (T) **Level 10 Solo Controller**
Large fey humanoid XP 2,500

HP 448; **Bloodied** 224 **Initiative** +9
AC 24, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20 **Perception** +12
Speed 6
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Brambly Flesh ✦ Aura 1
Any creature that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.

Hateful Resolve
Any effect that dominates or stuns the troll dazes it instead for the same duration.

Regeneration
The troll regains 20 hit points whenever it starts its turn and has at least 1 hit point. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, it does not regenerate on its next turn.

Standard Actions

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage, and the troll slides the target up to 2 squares.

Rending Claws ✦ At-Will
Effect: The troll uses *claw* twice. If both attacks hit the same target, that target is weakened until the end of the troll's next turn.

Grasping Brambles ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage. The troll pulls the target up to 4 squares, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Feyroot Snare (poison) **✦ Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 3 poison damage, and the target is restrained, cannot teleport, and takes ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends all).
Miss: Half damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

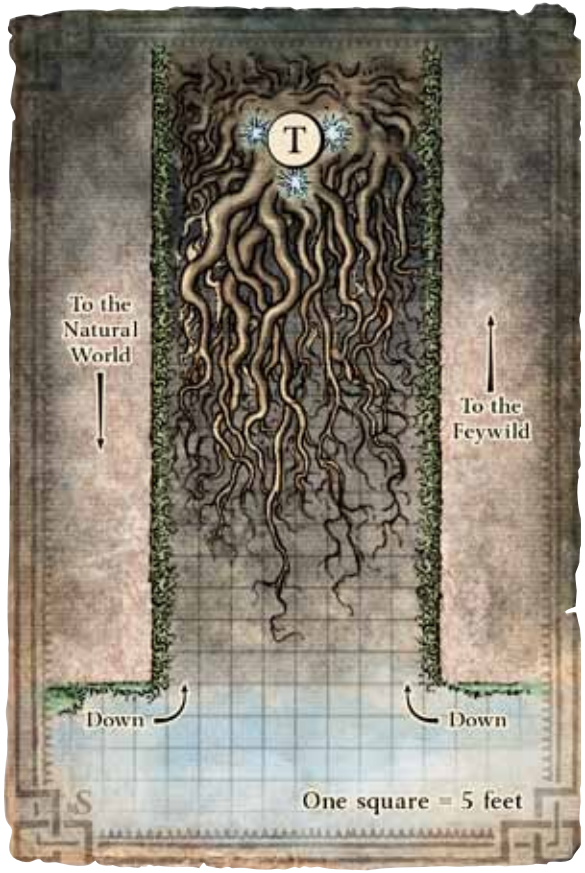
Triggered Actions

Savage Wrath ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The troll is damaged by an enemy attack.
Effect (Opportunity Action): The troll uses *claw*.

Skills Athletics +16, Endurance +17

Str 22 (+11)	**Dex** 19 (+9)	**Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 24 (+12)	**Int** 9 (+4)	**Cha** 9 (+4)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Giant



Far End of the Rift

Beyond the troll, the roots quickly thin out, and the rift continues for another 50 feet before breaking the ground's surface in the Feywild (see Event 6). Characters who aren't flying must make Athletics or Dungeoneering checks to scale the tunnel, as before.

Once the adventurers reach the top of the shaft, any motes of light that were following them sink back into the rift. (The motes are unable to leave the rift and disappear instantly if forcibly removed from it.) The flying ability granted by the motes ends as the affected characters leave the rift.

Event 6. Sisters of the Elkweald

Roleplaying Encounter or Combat Encounter
Level 9 (2,000 XP)

Adventurers who pass through the rift find themselves in a wooded valley similar to the one they left behind in the natural world, only much more verdant. This valley, referred to hereafter as the Elkweald, is located in a remote corner of the Feywild and defended by a militant group of female elves and eladrin sworn to protect the sovereign elk (but only in the Feywild).

Shortly after they arrive, the heroes encounter a patrol of elves and eladrin. This encounter assumes that the adventurers talk their way past the patrol, but statistics are provided in case a fight breaks out. There's no tactical map to accompany this encounter, but any woodland environment will do.

Light: Bright light during the day (sunlight), dim light at night (moonlight).

Monsters: 2 eladrin wealdwardens, 3 elf arrowmaidens. The adventurers receive full XP for befriending them or half XP for defeating them in combat.

When the characters pass through the rift, read:
You rise out of the rift to find yourself in a natural basin surrounded by enormous trees, fragrant wildflowers, and thick patches of clover. The air is filled with the sounds of chirping birds. A swath of flattened trees and crushed foliage left behind by the sovereign elk has been replaced with new growth. however, it's easy to discern the enormous hoof impressions left in the ground. In the sky overhead, a lonely cloud bears the vague likeness of a female archer.

The valley of Elkweald has the same area as its counterpart in the natural world, but the trees here are twice as tall and thick, and the vegetation is much more lush and vibrant. Sheer, fanglike mountains enclose this valley on all sides, with narrow mountain paths woven between them (leading to other realms of the Feywild that are beyond the scope of this adventure).

A character who succeeds on a DC 18 Arcana check discerns three ley lines intersecting at the rift. One radial follows the trail of flattened trees and foliage left by the sovereign elk. The others head off toward the edges of the valley.

If the heroes head toward any edge of the valley, they eventually come to an impassable wall of briars. The wall surrounds the valley, and movement is reduced to 0 by this challenging terrain. The briar wall is critical to the valley's defense, and only the elves and eladrin of Ironwood Spire (see Event 7) know how to form tunnels through it.

Don't Call Them Valley Girls

If the heroes follow the trail left by the sovereign elk, they don't get far before crossing paths with the eladrin and elf patrol.

Perception DC 23: Read the following text if one or more of the characters succeed on the check.

You follow the sovereign elk's trail through the forest, navigating around uprooted trees as thick as a horse is tall. You hear the snap of a twig underfoot. The sound emanates from the woods about 50 feet ahead.

The two eladrin wealdwardens are named Minerva and Sylvia. The elf arrowmaidens are I'alari, Solace, and Zendra. All five are hidden about 50 feet ahead

of the party, spread out in a wide arc (3 or 4 squares apart from one another). If the eladrin and elves think they've been detected, the wealdwardens step out of hiding to confront the heroes while the arrowmaidens ready arrows in case the interlopers attack.

The eladrin and elves wear curvaceous leather armor engraved with elk imagery. They are unaccustomed to intruders from the natural world and assume the heroes came through the rift. Their primary intent is to drive the intruders back into the rift and discourage further exploration of their sacred valley.

If the heroes tell the wealdwardens what they know about the yuan-ti drawing the sovereign elk to the mortal realm, the eladrin realize that they share a common enemy and offer to escort the party to Ironwood Spire to confer with Evisalyth, the leader of their sisterhood. If the heroes accept the offer, proceed with Event 7.

If the characters react in a boorish, insulting, or violent manner, the wealdwardens assume a more threatening posture and refuse to allow the interlopers to further desecrate their sacred valley. They demand the heroes leave at once or face the consequences. This is no idle threat, for the wealdwardens take their stewardship of the Elkweald seriously and, like many inhabitants of the Feywild, are quick to anger.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: If combat erupts, the arrowmaidens use *deep arrow* against enemies in melee combat with the wealdwardens, so that the wealdwardens gain combat advantage against them.

2 Eladrin Wealdwardens **Level 9 Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid XP 400 each

HP 96; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +10
AC 23, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +12
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Saving Throws +5 against charm effects

Traits

Air of Defiance
If the eladrin is marked by an enemy at the start of its turn, it can make a saving throw as a free action to end the marking effect.

Standard Actions

Longspear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 4 damage, or 2d10 + 8 if the eladrin has combat advantage against the target.

Javelin of Accuracy (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, or 2d6 + 10 if the eladrin has combat advantage against the target.

Move Actions

Fey Step (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The eladrin teleports up to 5 squares.

Skills Arcana +10, Athletics +12, Nature +12, Stealth +13
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 18 (+8) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 15 (+6)
Alignment good **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment leather armor, longspear, 2 javelins

3 Elf Arrowmaidens **Level 9 Artillery**
Medium fey humanoid XP 400 each

HP 80; **Bloodied** 40 **Initiative** +7
AC 23, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 21 **Perception** +12
Speed 7 Low-light vision

Traits

Wild Step
The elf ignores difficult terrain whenever it shifts.

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 10 damage.

Longbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

Deep Arrow (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 4d8 + 8 damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Elven Accuracy ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The elf makes an attack roll.
Effect (Free Action): The elf rerolls the triggering attack roll and uses the second result.

Skills Athletics +11, Nature +12, Stealth +12
Str 14 (+6) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 20 (+9) **Int** 11 (+4) **Cha** 12 (+5)
Alignment good **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment leather armor, short sword, longbow, 20 arrows

Event 7. Ironwood Spire

Roleplaying Encounter

Characters who befriend the eladrin wealdwardens and elf arrowmaidens in Event 6 are led across the valley of Elkweald to Ironwood Spire, home of the sisterhood. The journey takes about half a day on foot (Ironwood Spire is roughly the same distance and bearing from the rift as Skarn's fortress is from the rift in the natural world), and the sisters do not speak of the sovereign elk or engage in casual conversation during the trip. At Ironwood Spire, the characters can entreat with Evisalyth, the leader of the Elkweald sisterhood, and learn more about the yuan-ti plot involving the sovereign elk.

If the heroes lack the benefit of an escort, they must find Ironwood Spire on their own; see the "Exploring the Elkweald" sidebar for details.

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night (moonlight).

Monsters: Evisalyth (eladrin). The characters receive full XP for befriending her or half XP for defeating her in combat.

When the heroes arrive at Ironwood Spire, read:

The forest darkens as the canopies of the trees become more entwined, allowing only the occasional shaft of light to strike the ground. You weave among the wooden hills and enter a wondrous demesne illuminated by dancing swarms of fireflies. Within a wooded hollow stands a mighty ironwood tree. Encircling its trunk and resting upon its boughs are wooden habitats connected by stairs and walkways. Magical lights illuminate the tree from crown to roots.

The Sisters of the Elkweald, numbering about two hundred elves and eladrin, dwell here in Ironwood Spire. Their leader, Evisalyth, lives in chambers nestled among the tree's roots.

If the adventurers arrive without an escort, they can reach the base of Ironwood Spire unseen if they succeed on three DC 22 group Stealth checks. If they fail, another patrol of elves and eladrin confronts them (see Event 6 for details).

Members of the sisterhood will never talk candidly with the heroes, but once a truce has been negotiated with their leader, conversations can be overheard with Perception checks or Streetwise checks (see the "Information in Ironwood Spire" sidebar).

INFORMATION IN IRONWOOD SPIRE

Characters entering or infiltrating Ironwood Spire can eavesdrop on conversations and learn information by succeeding on a Perception check or a Streetwise check.

DC 15: The sisters of the Elkweald swore oaths to guard the valley and its resident archfey, the sovereign elk.

DC 20: The sisters of the Elkweald have lost their connection to the sovereign elk and are distraught. Evisalyth, their leader, knows the reason behind the sovereign elk's sudden departure.

DC 25: Whispered rumors suggest that "the prisoner" might somehow be responsible for recent troubles, but these are promptly silenced.

Evisalyth lives in a dwelling amid the roots of Ironwood Spire, which is well guarded by eladrin wealdwardens and elf arrowmaidens (see Event 6). If she is threatened, Evisalyth orders her guards to attack. Given the number of guards in and around Ironwood Spire, it would be foolish for the heroes to think they can fight their way to victory.

What Evisalyth Knows

Like many female eladrin, Evisalyth is gifted with a timeless beauty. Once she realizes the adventurers are searching for a way to return the sovereign elk to the Feywild, Evisalyth imparts the following information.

"We are stewards in the sovereign elk's realm. Without the archfey to nourish it, this realm will wither and corrupt. Though powerful in magic and body, the sovereign elk is ill equipped to protect itself against evil's influence. It has been drawn to the mortal realm, where its primal energy can wreak untold havoc. If you can guide the sovereign elk back to us, the sisters and I will endeavor to seal the rift it created."

Evisalyth removes a gossamer chain from around her neck. Hanging from the chain is a tiny vial. "This vial contains three drops of the sovereign elk's blood. Whoever imbibes the blood will be attuned to the archfey for a period of 24 hours. All three drops must be consumed by the one who wishes to bond with the sovereign elk. Only through this bond can one such as yourself guide its actions."

Evisalyth hands the vial of blood to whichever character agrees to take it. She doesn't have any more of the sovereign elk's blood on hand, so she cautions the recipient not to lose or waste it.

If asked why she hasn't made any attempt to retrieve the sovereign elk, Evisalyth replies:

"We neither command nor control the sovereign elk. We simply guard its domain. You are the defenders of your world. We wouldn't presume to usurp that responsibility."

If the characters question Evisalyth about the yuan-ti, she reveals the following information.

"Months ago, a band of yuan-ti assassins infiltrated our domain and attacked the sovereign elk with poisoned crossbow bolts. The elk was badly wounded but managed to drive off the interlopers. We tracked them down and slaughtered them before they could escape."

What Evisalyth doesn't know is that the yuan-ti never intended to kill the sovereign elk; they needed some of its blood. The yuan-ti leader, Senjarik, managed to escape with a small flask of the sovereign elk's blood while his underlings gave their lives to cover his escape.

If the characters inquire about a prisoner who might be the root of the problem, or if they simply ask Evisalyth why the yuan-ti summoned the sovereign elk to the natural world, she gives them a "I wish you hadn't asked me that" look before gesturing to them to follow her downstairs.

Evisalyth guides you down a spiral staircase that artfully weaves through the ironwood tree's enormous roots. The stairs end in a half-circular earthen room, the back wall of which is forged from cold iron. The wall is etched with glyphs, and a cold iron door set in the middle of the wall bears the graven image of a sovereign elk fighting a giant snake with a human head. The door has neither a handle nor hinges.

"Ironwood Spire is thousands of years old," says Evisalyth, "and this wall is part of a prison buried thousands of years before that. The evil trapped within was defeated by a powerful eladrin archfey that could assume the form of a giant elk in battle.

"In time, the archfey forgot its original form and became the sovereign elk. Around the same time, Ironwood Spire rose from the earth and coiled its mighty roots around the cold iron prison to ensure that it would never be unearthed. Or so the legends say."

The Cold Iron Prison

The rune-etched wall is identical to the one unearthed in the mine under Skarn's fortress in the Stormbolt Highlands. In fact, it's one side of a cubical prison that exists both in the Feywild and the natural world. The Elven runes are powerful wards placed upon the prison; they render it impervious to magic and damage. Knocking on the door or the surrounding wall produces a hollow sound, but any attempt to enter or peer into the chamber beyond fails automatically.

A character who inspects the wall or the door and succeeds on a DC 18 Arcana check senses overwhelming magic in the form of powerful binding and warding rituals but cannot name the specific rituals in question, since they've been lost over time.

Touching the Door: The sovereign elk can open the prison's cold iron door by touching it with its antlers, and no other force in existence has that power. However, drinking the vial of the sovereign elk's blood invests the imbiber with enough of the archfey's life force to trigger an effect by touching the door. If a character does so, read:

You are seemingly teleported inside a cube-shaped chamber of cold iron, 30 feet tall and 30 feet on a side. Floating in the middle of the room is a 10-foot-diameter sphere of crackling green energy, and trapped within this eldritch field is a large serpentine creature screaming and writhing in agony. It looks like the creature depicted on the prison door. A few seconds later, you're back outside the prison, and it suddenly dawns on you that you never left this spot.

The Prisoner: If the characters ask Evisalyth who or what is trapped in the prison, she replies:

"According to ancient lore, the prisoner is a naga exarch of Zehir, but only the sovereign elk has the power to free it. The roots of Ironwood Spire protect the prison from the sovereign elk in the Feywild, but I suspect the prison as it exists in the natural world has no such defense. That is why the sovereign elk has been drawn there. Clever, those yuan-ti."

By now, the heroes' next course of action should be clear: They must return to the natural world and confront the sovereign elk before it reaches the cold iron prison buried in the Stormbolt Highlands.

Evisalyth	**Level 10 Elite Lurker**
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin	XP 1,000
HP 162; **Bloodied** 81	**Initiative** +14
AC 24, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24	**Perception** +14
Speed 6	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2, +7 against charm effects; **Action Points** 1	

Standard Actions

Longspear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage, or 4d10 + 14 if the target cannot see Evisalyth.

Double Attack ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Evisalyth uses *longspear* twice.

Whirlwind of Leaves (zone) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is blinded until the end of Evisalyth's next turn.
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Evisalyth's next turn. Enemies are blinded while in the zone.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of Evisalyth's next turn.

Invisibility (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Evisalyth is invisible until the end of her next turn. The invisibility also ends immediately after she uses an attack power.

Move Actions

Fey Step (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Evisalyth teleports up to 5 squares.

Triggered Actions

Defensive Displacement (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Trigger: An enemy makes an attack against Evisalyth.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Evisalyth teleports up to 5 squares.

Skills Arcana +14, History +14, Insight +14, Nature +14, Stealth +15

Str 12 (+6)	**Dex** 21 (+10)	**Wis** 18 (+9)
Con 15 (+7)	**Int** 18 (+9)	**Cha** 22 (+11)

Alignment good **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment longspear

EXPLORING THE ELKWEALD

If the heroes explore the Elkweald without an escort, they might encounter some of the realm's deadlier inhabitants before finding Ironwood Spire. Their ability to navigate is confounded by the inherent magic of the valley, which deliberately leads them into trouble. The elves and eladrin that protect the Elkweald are not susceptible to the valley's magical misdirection.

Have the characters make a group skill check (Arcana or Nature, each character's choice) against DC 26. If the party fails the group check, the heroes lose their way for 1d6 hours and have a random wilderness encounter at the end of that time (see below). The first time they succeed, they realize that some primal, magical force is attempting to misdirect them. Each success still costs them 1d4 hours of overland travel time; however, after the characters succeed on five group checks, the valley no longer tries to misdirect them, and they happen upon Ironwood Spire 1d4 hours later.

All of the monsters in the encounters below are described in *Monster Manual® 3* unless otherwise indicated. Roll a d6 to determine what the heroes come upon during their aimless wanderings, and reroll if the result is the same as a previous one.

⚀ (**Encounter Level 9; 2,100 XP**): 1 pact hag and 3 enslaved wood nymphs. The pact hag carries a level 10 uncommon magic item.

⚁ (**Encounter Level 9; 2,200 XP**): 4 verbeeg rowdies and 1 verbeeg ringleader. The verbeeg ringleader carries a level 11 uncommon magic item.

⚂ (**Encounter Level 9; 2,275 XP**): 1 oblivion moss mindmaster and 6 mosslings.

⚃ (**Encounter Level 9; 2,450 XP**): 2 su sentinels, 5 su ambushers, and 1 su alpha.

⚄ (**Encounter Level 10; 2,500 XP**): 1 briar troll (page 11). This is the sister of the troll encountered in the planar rift (see Event 5). She carries a level 12 uncommon or rare magic item.

⚅ A herd of elk with golden antlers. The elk flee if attacked or approached. Characters searching the area find 1d6 broken elk antlers worth 500 gp apiece.

Event 8. Battle in the Highlands

Combat Encounter Level 13 (4,000 XP)

Assuming the adventurers part with Evisalyth on good terms, they are escorted back to the planar rift. Navigating the rift is a simple matter, provided the characters defeated the briar troll in Event 5; if not, they must confront the troll once more.

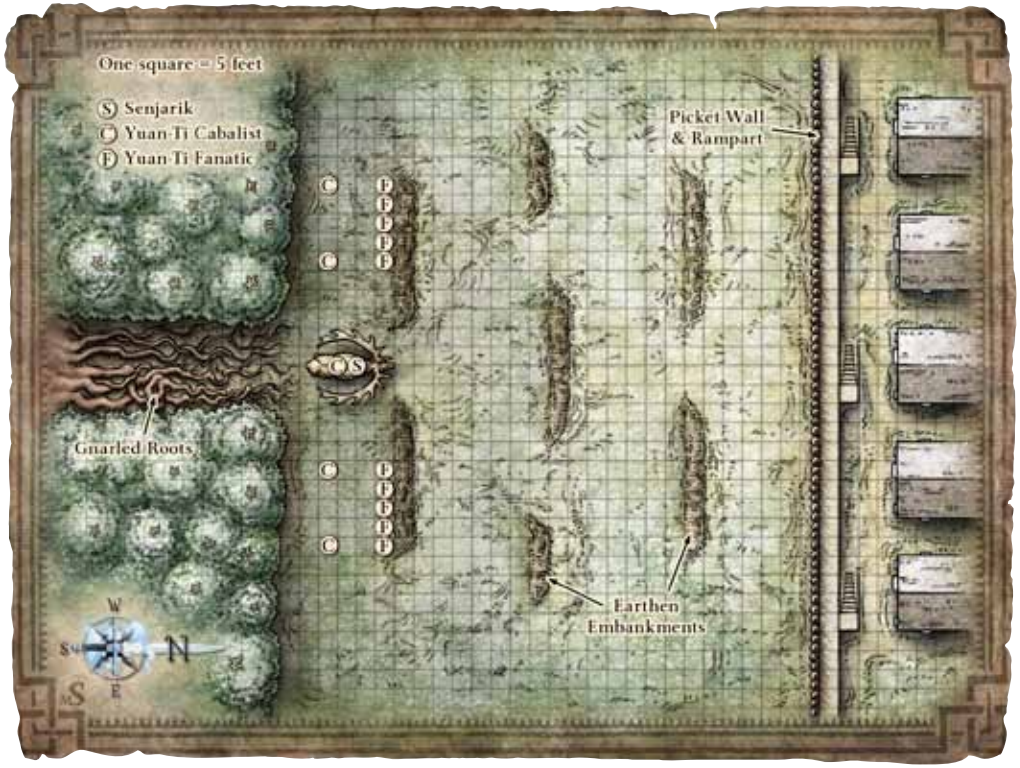
Once they emerge from the rift, the characters can follow the sovereign elk's path of destruction northeast to the village of Elkridge. When they arrive, they find the village abandoned; not surprisingly, much has happened in their absence.

Left to their own devices, Skarn Felstorm and her soldiers did everything in their power to protect the village of Elkridge from the advancing sovereign elk. The settlement was evacuated, and thankfully only a handful of buildings were destroyed. Leaving her mother behind to care for the evacuated villagers, Skarn quickly retreated to her fortress to prepare for the sovereign elk's arrival.

As the heroes leave the abandoned village and continue their pursuit of the sovereign elk, they hear battle horns blowing in the highlands.

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night (moonlight).

Monsters: Sovereign elk, Senjarik (yuan-ti commander), 5 yuan-ti cabalists, 10 yuan-ti fanatics.



When the characters leave the Feywild, read:

The planar rift leads you back to the natural world. You follow the sovereign elk's destructive swath to Elkridge to find that the village has been abandoned. Though you see a handful of destroyed cottages, their broken foundations choked with fey brambles, most of the settlement survived the archfey's passage, which continues northeast toward the highlands. After marching a few hundred yards in that direction, you hear the sound of battle horns in the distance.

In anticipation of the sovereign elk's arrival, the yuan-ti have launched a full-scale assault on Skarn's fortress in the Stormbolt Highlands. Regardless of how quickly the characters reach the highlands, they arrive to see the battle already joined.

A fortress surrounded by a wooden palisade stands near the top of a hill overlooking the valley. Dozens of soldiers lie dead on the rocky hillside amid the slaughtered remains of yuan-ti cabalists and their snaketongue lackeys.

The sovereign elk marches slowly but inevitably toward the fortress, gnarled roots erupting from the ground in its wake. Two yuan-ti armed with crossbows ride the elk while several more slither and run alongside it. Archers fire arrows from the fortress ramparts, but they do nothing to slow the elk's advance.

Skarn Felstorm and her faithful warwing drake are behind the fortress wall, recovering from poisoned wounds. Although she still commands her troops, Skarn is in no condition to rejoin the battle.

The yuan-ti force has been greatly reduced, but the evil serpentfolk have the sovereign elk on their side. Senjarik, the yuan-ti commander, imbibed a few drops of the sovereign elk's blood and now controls the archfey, guiding it toward the fortress and the cold iron prison buried below. Before the heroes can gain control of the sovereign elk, they must slay Senjarik.

The yuan-ti commander intends to free the naga exarch imprisoned in the mines below Skarn's fortress to gain the blessing of his dark god. Without Zehir's blessing, Senjarik doesn't think he can conquer Elkridge and the surrounding valley.

Months ago, Senjarik and several yuan-ti cabalists infiltrated the sovereign elk's demesne in the Feywild, attacked the archfey, and managed to obtain a small quantity of its blood in a flask. (The sovereign elk loses its *regeneration* trait in the Feywild.) Although his cabalists were hunted down and killed by the Sisters of the Elkweald, Senjarik survived and managed to escape with the flask. In the intervening months, he has received fractured dreams from the naga exarch of Zehir, demanding release.

Most of the sovereign elk's blood was spent in the summoning ritual (see Event 2), but Senjarik kept a few drops so that he could take control of the archfey when the moment was right.

Gnarled Roots: Wherever the sovereign elk walks, gnarled roots 4 squares across immediately sprout up from the ground behind it, forming difficult terrain.

Senjarik (S) **Level 10 Elite Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile), yuan-ti XP 1,000

HP 160; **Bloodied** 80 **Initiative** +11
AC 24, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 22 **Perception** +13
Speed 7
Resist 10 poison
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Scimitar (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

Crossbow (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Double Shot ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Senjarik uses *crossbow* twice.

Shattering Bolt (poison, weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Area burst 1 within 15 (creatures in the burst); +17 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Minor Actions

Mental Rebuke (psychic) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +13 vs. Will
Hit: Until the end of Senjarik's next turn, the target takes 10 psychic damage each time it makes an attack against Senjarik.

Skills Arcana +14, Athletics +14, History +14, Stealth +16
Str 18 (+9) **Dex** 22 (+11) **Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 14 (+7) **Int** 19 (+9) **Cha** 20 (+10)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment scimitar, crossbow, 30 poisoned bolts, flask of sovereign elk blood

Embankments: These 10-foot-high rocky embankments grant superior cover to creatures behind them.

Wooden Palisade: Trees have been cut down and sharpened to form a 25-foot-high palisade with a 20-foot-high rampart catwalk behind it. Medium or Small creatures standing on the catwalk gain superior cover against attacks from outside the fortress. Each 5-foot section of wall has 100 hp, AC 15, Fortitude 15, Reflex 0. The wall can be climbed with a DC 25 Athletics check. The stairs leading up the ramparts are gradual enough to not count as difficult terrain.

5 Yuan-Ti Cabalists (C) **Level 9 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) XP 400 each

HP 100; **Bloodied** 50 **Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20 **Perception** +7
Speed 7
Resist 10 poison

Traits

Whipping Tail ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura is slowed until the start of its next turn.

Standard Actions

Venomite Pick (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 3 damage plus 5 poison damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the yuan-ti's next turn.

Snakebite Crossbow (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Skills Arcana +13, Nature +12, Thievery +11
Str 22 (+10) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 20 (+9) **Int** 18 (+8) **Cha** 12 (+5)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Equipment war pick, crossbow, 10 bolts

Treasure: Senjarik still has a few drops of the sovereign elk's blood in a flask, enough to allow four more creatures to bond with the archfey (see Event 9).

Characters looting corpses on the hillside retrieve a total of 750 gp in mixed coinage, but the act doesn't

sit well with Skarn, who reneges on her promise to award them a parcel of land (see Event 4).

Tactics: Skarn's militia, currently numbering twenty soldiers, has retreated behind the palisade. However, the soldiers do not have line of sight to yuan-ti hidden behind the rocky embankments, and their arrows have little effect against the sovereign elk.

The sovereign elk marches toward the fortress and begins striking the palisade wall with its hooves, attacking twice per round and dealing 4d6 + 5 damage with each hit. Once it creates a breach 4 squares wide, it enters the compound. One round later, it reaches the entrance to the mine and begins pushing its way underground toward the buried cold iron prison. The earth around it seems to magically give way. After 5 rounds of digging, the sovereign elk reaches the prison and touches it with its antlers; if that happens, see "Aftermath" (page 22).

Senjarik rides the sovereign elk until it reaches the mine, at which point he dismounts. Whether mounted on the elk or not, if Senjarik is attacked by an enemy that is within the elk's reach, the yuan-ti commander orders the elk to attack that enemy. Otherwise, he leaves the elk alone.

Senjarik gains partial cover while riding atop the sovereign elk. From this advantageous position, he fires his crossbow and uses *mental rebuke* to discourage enemies from attacking him. The yuan-ti commander keeps one of his cabalists close by as a bodyguard; the others attack from the ground. If Senjarik is forced off the sovereign elk, he takes cover and continues making ranged and area attacks. Only when Senjarik is dead can the elk be compelled to cease its assault.

The yuan-ti cabalists and fanatics move from one embankment to another, using them as cover against arrows fired from the fortress. Senjarik considers these forces disposable and is interested only in freeing the imprisoned naga exarch.

10 Yuan-Ti Fanatics (F)	**Level 9 Minion Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 100 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +7
AC 21, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19	**Perception** +10
Speed 7	
Immune fire (in fire serpent form only)	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Scimitar** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The yuan-ti must be in humanoid form.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 10 damage.	
⊕ **Bite** (fire) ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The yuan-ti must be in fire serpent form.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 15 fire damage.	
Miss: 7 fire damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Fire Serpent Form (polymorph) ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The yuan-ti dies.	
Effect (No Action): The yuan-ti transforms into a Medium fire serpent with 1 hit point. Its statistics are otherwise unchanged.	
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 13 (+5)	
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 14 (+6) **Cha** 10 (+4)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Draconic	
Equipment scimitar	

Development

Once Senjarik is slain, the characters can attempt to stop the sovereign elk from reaching the cold iron prison buried under Skarn's fortress; proceed with Event 9.

Event 9. The Archfey's Torpor

Skill-Based Encounter Level 11 (3,000 XP)

To stop the sovereign elk, one or more characters must first bond with it—not an easy task, given the elk's present frame of mind. Before a bond can be forged, the following conditions must be met.

- ✦ The character seeking to bond with the sovereign elk must have imbibed three or more drops of its blood within the past 24 hours. (The blood given by Evisalyth or taken from Senjarik will do.)
- ✦ Senjarik must be slain.
- ✦ The character must be touching the sovereign elk.

If these conditions are met, the character can choose to participate in the skill challenge. Multiple characters can attempt to bond with the elk if they wish.

When a character chooses to bond with the sovereign elk (a standard action), he or she is removed from play and enters the sovereign elk's twisted mindscape. Characters drawn into the sovereign elk's mind act during their normal turns in the initiative order, and while they're exploring the mindscape, the elk continues its attack on Skarn's fortress.

A character trapped in the archfey's mindscape is unaware of what's happening in the natural world but can leave the mindscape at any time (as a standard action), appearing in an unoccupied space on the ground adjacent to the sovereign elk. A character who leaves the mindscape can reenter it provided he or she is in direct physical contact with the elk.

When one or more characters enter the sovereign elk's mindscape, read:

You appear on a hillside overlooking a grassy vale strewn with ancient alabaster ruins, in the midst of which stand the legs and feet of a shattered statue that once touched the sky.

Two hundred paces from the foot of the hill lies the shore of a pristine lake that feeds a river that snakes through the valley. On the far side of the mile-wide lake, a large herd of elk grazes and frolics. Now and again, golden fish leap out of the lake, catch the sunlight, and dive back underwater. It's a beautiful sight, but something feels wrong.

Above you, atop the hill, stands a 7-foot-tall eladrin with a 3-foot-high crown of antlers sprouting from his head. Twigs and leaves are caught in his wild mane, which blows in the warm breeze. His eyes are closed, and he seems oblivious to you and his surroundings. Ashen clouds gather behind him and quickly spread across the sky, blotting out the sun. From these clouds descends a monstrous serpent made of smoke. It coils downward and sinks its fangs into the lake, turning the water to poison. The poison spreads downriver, causing plants to wither and die. The elk scatter and flee.

Characters who succeed on a DC 19 Insight check realize they've been physically drawn to a realm that exists only in the archfey's addled mind. The antlered eladrin represents the sovereign elk and is completely unresponsive. If attacked, he has the same defenses and hit points as the sovereign elk, as well as its *regeneration* trait (see page 7 for statistics).

The characters know intuitively that they must free the eladrin from his torpor to succeed. Doing so requires them to explore the valley and undertake certain actions, as described in "Exploring the Mindscape" below.

Taking Damage: Characters take damage and deplete resources as normal within the mindscape. It is, from their point of view, as real a place as any other. A character who drops to 0 hit points or fewer while in the mindscape is immediately transported back to the natural world, appearing in an unoccupied space on the ground adjacent to the sovereign elk.

Teleportation: A character within the mindscape can teleport to any destination he or she can see as an at-will move action. This ability allows characters to navigate the valley and accomplish their goals quickly, even as the battle in the "real world" rages on.

Exploring the Mindscape

To end the archfey's torpor and gain control of the sovereign elk, the characters understand that they must visit certain places within the mindscape, retrieve things or information that remind the archfey of its true nature, and present these items to the antlered eladrin. Here are the tasks they must complete before returning to the eladrin.

- ✦ Retrieve a silver harp from the bottom of the lake.
- ✦ Treat a dying elk to earn the kinship of the herd.
- ✦ Find what's left of the temple of Corellon in the ruined eladrin city, and gain clarity of mind.
- ✦ Learn the archfey's true name from what remains of the giant statue.

Searching the Lake (Athletics or Endurance): *The waters of the lake have turned green and opaque, and floating on the surface are hundreds of dead golden trout.*

Characters standing near the shore can make a DC 13 Insight check to sense that there's something they need at the bottom of the poisoned lake; a character who beats the DC by 5 or more knows the item is a silver harp that once belonged to the archfey.

The characters must scour the depths of the lake for the harp without imbibing the poisoned waters. Each character who does so can make a DC 19 Athletics check or Endurance check (player's choice). For each character in the mindscape who doesn't participate in the search, apply a –2 penalty to the other characters' skill checks.

If at least half the characters searching the lake succeed on their skill checks, they retrieve the harp. If fewer than half succeed, the characters still retrieve the harp but those who failed the check lose three healing surges each (for imbibing poisoned waters).

Helping the Herd (Heal or Nature): *The herd of elk has reassembled near the poisoned river. Several females gather around a bull lying on its side in the tall grass.*

Characters approaching the herd can make a DC 13 Insight check to sense that the archfey cares about the fate of the herd; a character who beats the DC by 5 or more knows the females won't survive long without the bull elk to lead and protect them.

The characters must treat the bull elk, which drank from the poisoned river and is slowly dying. Each character who does so can make a DC 19 Heal check or Nature check (player's choice). For each character in the mindscape who doesn't participate in the treatment, apply a –2 penalty to the other characters' skill checks.

If at least half the characters helping the herd succeed on their skill checks, the bull is saved and slowly gains the strength to rise and walk. If fewer than half succeed, the bull dies and decomposes rapidly, leaving only its bones and antlers behind. Characters who behold the sight lose three healing surges each. Regardless of whether the characters succeed or fail, the herd follows them (while staying out of harm's way) until they leave the mindscape.

Exploring the Ruins (Religion or Streetwise): *Not much remains of this eladrin city except a few toppled statues, some cracked foundations, and crumbled alabaster walls.*

Characters exploring the ruins can make a DC 13 Insight check to sense that the archfey lived in this city long before it fell to ruin. A character who beats the DC by 5 or more recalls the city's name: Dimira.

The characters must locate the foundation of the city's temple to Corellon, whereupon they will gain clarity of mind. Nothing of the temple remains except for its foundation, and locating it requires a DC 19 Religion check or Streetwise check (player's choice). For each character in the mindscape who doesn't participate in the search, apply a –2 penalty to the other characters' skill checks.

If at least half the characters searching the ruins succeed on their skill checks, they find the temple's foundation. Those who stand upon it gain the clarity of mind they seek. If fewer than half succeed, the characters locate the foundation of Sehanine's temple instead; although they still gain clarity of mind for standing on the foundation, any character who does so also triggers a divine trap that deprives him or her of three healing surges each.

Identifying the Statue (Arcana or History): *Only the calves and feet of the titanic statue remain, but each partial limb stands nearly 50 feet tall. Glowing glyphs entwine around the legs of the statue as you approach.*

Characters standing at the base of the ruined statue can make a DC 13 Insight check to sense that the statue once depicted a male eladrin. A character who beats the DC by 5 or more realizes that the statue was a towering effigy of the archfey in its original form, before it transformed into the sovereign elk.

The characters must learn the archfey's true name, which has been all but forgotten. Clues can be found by deciphering the glyphs imprinted upon the statue and correlating the nuggets of historical information they provide with the correct historical name. Each character who tries to interpret the glyphs can make a DC 19 Arcana check or History check (player's choice). For each character in the mindscape who doesn't help, apply a –2 penalty to the other characters' skill checks.

If at least half the characters succeed on their skill checks, they glean the archfey's true name: Jalfarien Khaldros. If fewer than half succeed, the characters still learn the name but they lose three healing surges each when the glyphs cause the remainder of the statue to explode, buried them in rubble.

Awakening the Archfey

Once the characters have explored the mindscape, they must bring the silver harp, the elk herd, their clarity of mind, and the archfey's true name to the antlered eladrin. When this is done, read:

A hot wind blows atop the hill upon which the antlered eladrin stands, eyes closed. As you approach, the black clouds overhead transform into a writhing nest of ashen vipers that slowly begin to rain down.

The elk herd surrounds the hilltop, forming a circle around you and the archfey. White wisps of energy begin rising from their antlers, forming a protective shield of magic that keeps the raining vipers at bay. What do you do?

If one of the characters strums the harp, the elk start braying. If a character gifted with clarity of mind intones the archfey's true name (Jalfarien Khaldros), read:

The eladrin opens his eyes. Within these deep pools of golden light you see unearthly calm and sudden clarity. "Prepare yourselves," he says in a deep voice that all can comprehend.

With that, the archfey transports all the characters trapped in its mindscape back to the natural world and grants each of them 50 temporary hit points. The characters appear in unoccupied spaces adjacent to the sovereign elk, which is no longer under evil's spell.

Award the characters 3,000 XP for successfully completing this encounter.

Aftermath

If the characters awaken the archfey's subconscious mind before the sovereign elk releases the naga exarch from its cold iron prison, they are returned to the natural world with 50 temporary hit points and quickly discover that the sovereign elk is already making its way back to the planar rift it created. It wants nothing more to do with the natural world. The characters still need to eradicate any remaining yuan-ti, including whatever new arrivals you deign to throw at them. (No doubt your players will relish opportunities to burn all those temporary hit points.)

If the characters are unable to stop the sovereign elk before it unlocks the cold iron prison, the prison door opens. If one or more characters are close enough to witness the event, read:

The sovereign elk touches the door of the cold iron prison with the tip of one antler, and the portal swings open. A creature with the head of a human and the body of a serpent is unceremoniously expelled from within and tumbles across the ground. The sovereign elk tries to crush the naga beneath its hooves, but the serpent is too agile. It coils and slithers away from its gargantuan liberator.

"Not this time, my nemesis," the naga hisses. "We shall face each other again in your distant realm, but not before I poison this world to death." With that, the naga turns to smoke and vanishes before your eyes.

The naga exarch of Zehir is much higher in level than the heroes but is depleted after its long incarceration; consequently, it isn't spoiling for a fight. Perhaps the adventurers will encounter it again in the future when they're of high enough level to defeat it; ultimately, that's for you to decide.

Having freed the naga from the prison, the sovereign elk has nothing more to do except return to its own plane. It follows a ley line back to the planar rift and disappears into it. Once the sovereign elk returns to its demesne, Evisalyth and her sisterhood find a way to seal the rift. In the days and weeks ahead, the sovereign elk's path of destruction becomes overgrown with all manner of fey-touched plants—a lingering reminder of Elkridge's brush with the Feywild.

Skarn Felstorm survives the attack on her fortress and begins to rebuild that which was destroyed. If the naga exarch was set free, she knows Elkridge has difficult times ahead; although she puts on a brave face, Skarn fears that the yuan-ti will claim the valley and drive her people out.

If the naga exarch remains imprisoned, Skarn orders the mine buried and sealed to prevent anyone from getting close to it, and she vows to fortify her fortress even more to make sure it never falls into yuan-ti clutches. She also makes good on her promise to reward the heroes with land (see Event 4) and even throws in some additional treasure (see below), provided they haven't offended her in any way.

Treasure: If Skarn is pleased with the characters' handling of the situation, she gives them 1,000 pp and a rare or uncommon level 13 item from her personal hoard, as well as horses if the characters want them.

About the Author

Kolja Raven Liquette began writing Dungeons & Dragons game material when he was 8 years old, immediately after somebody handed him a character sheet with the word "ranger" scrawled across the top. He was told to roll dice occasionally, had only the vaguest understanding of what was happening, but knew that he wanted to keep doing it at least once a week. After writing for numerous D&D supplements, Kolja has taken to the region of Elkridge. "Force of Nature" is the third published adventure set in this region.

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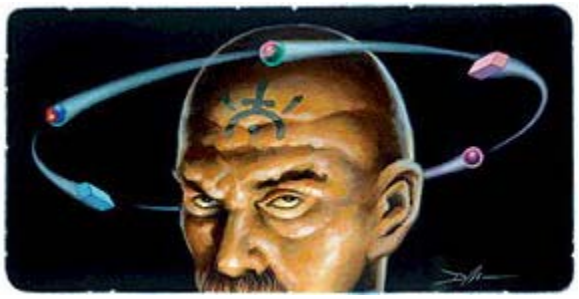
Vance and Evard

D&D Alumni

Bart Carroll



A review series in *The Onion*'s *AV Club* called "I Watched This On Purpose" takes a look at presumably awful movies for the sake of reviewing them (or, in their words "…to spend time with trashy-looking yet in some way irresistible entertainments, playing the long odds in hopes of a real reward."). I recently decided to try a related experiment, albeit with far, far better material -- a sort of "I Read This On Purpose" when it came to gaming classics. I've owned it long enough for the pages to break free of their binding after years of flipping to various sections, but I decided -- for the first time -- to completely read through the 1st Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*, cover to cover.

It might have been a recent *Legends & Lore* column that prompted me (Fighters & Wizards), wherein Mike Mearls mentions 1st Edition's recovery rules that came into play after a character reaches 0 hit points. The rules are right there on page 82, but that was a section I'd never read before and never referenced in play. What other secret miscellany (of which I already knew there was plenty) did the book have to offer?

Not surprisingly, I didn't make it very far -- not past the credits and acknowledgements -- before finding my first curiosity. Along with presumable designers, developers, artists, and playtesters (among them, Dave Arneson, James M. Ward, Ernie and Luke Gygax, Skip Williams, and more), Gary Gygax singled out one author for special mention: Jack Vance.

Later in the book in Appendix N: Inspirational and Educational Reading, you can find a list of books that influenced the game, including Tolkien, Fritz Leiber, Robert Howard -- and Jack Vance. But why, of all these luminaries, did the *Dungeon Master's Guide* single Vance out in the acknowledgements? I never found the answer, but in this installment of *D&D Alumni*, we'll look briefly at Vance's inspirations in the game, notably where they intersect with the coming season of *D&D Encounters*. A connection does exist, so let's get to it.

Vecna

For starters, aside from direct mentions in the texts, the game's creators had a penchant for hiding their names in the names of characters: Zagyg Yragerne for Gary Gygax, Drawmij for James Ward, the hill giant Chief Nosnra for Dave Arneson (and a more comprehensive list can be found at greyhawkonline). As an added callout, Jack Vance had his name immortalized in the game in the anagram Vecna (though Vecna owes much to Michael Moorcock's Corum).

Then you have the spells and artifacts from Vance's works.

Ioun Stones

Last month, we spoke at length about the multitude of sources for the game's monsters. The same holds true for its magic items. *Boots of striding and springing*, *flying carpets*, *dancing swords* -- these and so very many more came straight from fable and legend. Other magic items came

Who Is Jack Vance?

For those of you who haven't read Vance -- shame on you! Author of sci-fi, fantasy, and mystery, Jack Vance had a major influence upon the game largely due to his *Dying Earth* stories. As the name suggests, these stories are placed in a far-distant future, with the sun on the decline and the world in a state where science and magic coexist. The magic system in these stories, with their "fire-and-forget" spellcasting, has since come to be known as the Vancian magic system.

from pulp influences. Grognardia recently noted the *cubic gate*'s origins in L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt's story "The Carnelian Cube."

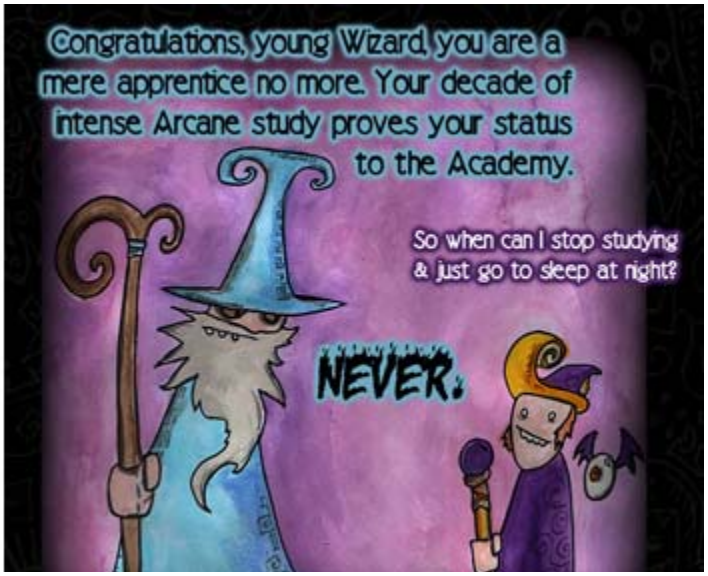
Ioun stones, likewise, originated in Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* series. *Dragon* 174 even offered a backstory to the *ioun stones* as they first appeared in Vance's short story, "Morreion":

> This tale reveals that these magically enhanced gemstones are created naturally, deep inside the hearts of stars, being found in abundance within burned-out stars. These stellar husks possess immense gravitational fields, protecting the stones they contain. As these stars penetrate the leading edge of the expanding universe, they encounter a barrier, known as the nothing. Collision with the barrier causes the star to vanish, layer by layer, gradually exposing the glittering cargo that is hidden within the core. Here lie the ioun stones, nestled in pockets of black dust on a vast glistening plane that is known as the shining-fields.
>
> The now-revealed gems are then collected, at great risk, by a race of blue-scaled, demonlike creatures, the archveults. Harvesting is achieved by hovering above the star's vanishing surface, safely suspended on specially made rafts called slideboards that protect them from crushing gravity. From these platforms, the archveults greedily remove the stones from the surrounding loose material. Using arcane and physical means, and being careful to remain within the dust area (stepping outside of the dust is instant death), the archveults quickly gather the gems. Remaining overlong on the surface is risking deadly contact with the nothing, a horrifying death as the victim slowly vanishes.
>
> The underlying theme through all of these novels is the fact that stones are of enormous magical value. These gems are the most highly prized and jealously guarded magicks that a wizard owns. Some of these wizards, notably Morreion, possessed a veritable cloud of stones that followed them about at all times.

The article went on to create several more versions of *ioun stones*, as well as potential explanation for their appearance in the D&D universe. (A comprehensive list of *ioun stones* can be found at Jonathan Drain's d20 Source.) Although their specific magic might not have been mentioned in Vance's works, the game took it upon itself to assign the *ioun stones* powerfully desirable properties (ability score bonuses, spell absorption, level gain), and these stones circled the user's head in glowing orbits. A few stones reappeared in the current game (the clear stone as the *ioun stone of sustenance*, the pearly white as the *ioun stone of regeneration*), and new ones have been added (the *jet black ioun stone*).

Vancian Spellcasting

> "The tomes which held Turjan's sorcery lay on the long table of black steel or were thrust helter-skelter into shelves. These were volumes compiled by many wizards of the past, untidy folios collected by the sage, leather-bound librams setting forth the syllables of a hundred powerful spells, so cogent that Turjan's brain could know but four at a time."
> —Jack Vance, *Tales of the Dying Earth*


Congratulations, young Wizard, you are a mere apprentice no more. Your decade of intense Arcane study proves your status to the Academy.
So when can I stop studying & just go to sleep at night?
NEVER.

Yet when we think of Jack Vance's intersection with the *Dungeons & Dragons* game, what springs to mind for most of us, of course, is the "Vancian" system of spellcasting. In Vance's stories, wizards and mages needed to study their spellbooks each night, selecting specific spells to memorize, but with these spells then forgotten immediately upon casting. If this sounds familiar, it should -- it pretty much defined the game's spellcasting system through several editions.

The 1st Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* stated that players wishing to understand the system should consult Vance's *The Eyes of the Overworld* and *The Dying Earth* (as well as John Bellair's *The Face in the Frost*—though having read it, while this book is wonderfully descriptive it offers virtually nothing in terms of a spellcasting system). The system held true

even for clerics, who received their spells through prayer instead of study, but lost them just the same:

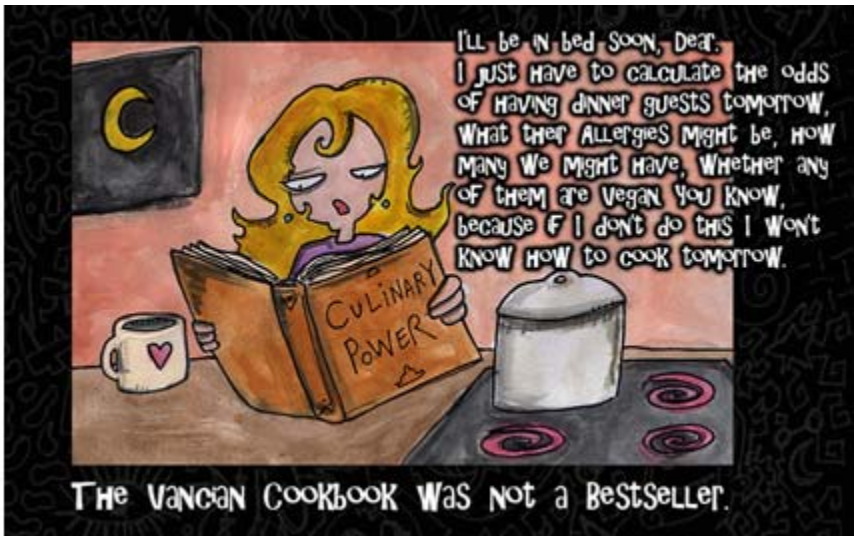
> All magic and cleric spells are similar in that the word sounds, when combined into whatever patterns are applicable, are charged with energy from the Positive or Negative Material Plane. When uttered, these sounds cause the release of this energy, which in turn triggers a set reaction. The release of the energy contained in these words is what causes the spell to be forgotten or the writing to disappear from the surface upon which it is written.
> —*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 40

In the same *Legends & Lore* column mentioned above, Mearls writes about the balance between fighters and wizards -- with fighters being stronger in the early game and necessary to protect the wizards, who in turn became stronger in the late game. Spell memorization also served as a balancing mechanism, designed to mitigate the spells' powerful effects by requiring magic-users and clerics to spend time recovering them -- much time, in some cases. For example, 1st-level spells required 4 uninterrupted hours of rest, on up to 12 hours for 9th-level spells, *plus* a quarter of an hour per spell level in study or prayer to then memorize them.

An entire column could be written on the evolution of the game's spell systems -- how the 3rd Edition sorcerer presented a paradigm shift in spellcasting with their steady supply of magic. And now 4th Edition spellcasting has since (theoretically) moved further away from a Vancian system, largely due to a shift from resource management and the limitations this imposed on the "adventuring day." At the same time, it could be argued that although wizards now always have a spell to cast in battle, they (and every other class, for that matter) must still marshal the limited resources of their encounter and daily powers.

> "Mazirian made a selection from his books and with great effort forced five spells upon his brain: Phandaal's Gyrator, Felojun's Second Hypnotic Spell, The Excellent Prismatic Spray, The Charm of Untiring Nourishment, and the Spell of the Omnipotent Sphere."
> —Jack Vance, *Tales of the Dying Earth*

Whatever the pros and cons of each system, Vancian spellcasting remains a cherished part of the D&D game's rich history. This includes the convention of certain spells having proper names, which is attributed to Vance's story element that one can discover only a finite number of spells in the world (slightly over a hundred). These spells are then amended with the name of the wizard discovering them. The naming convention carried over to spells in the game such as *Bigby's grasping hand*, *Tenser's floating disk*, and countless more.


I'll be in bed soon, Dear. I just have to calculate the odds of having dinner guests tomorrow, what their allergies might be, how many we might have, whether any of them are vegan you know, because if I don't do this I won't know how to cook tomorrow.
Culinary Power
The Vancian Cookbook Was Not a Bestseller.

One supplement, *Netheril: Empire of Magic*, went so far as to give proper names to formerly unnamed spells, so that *disintegrate* became *Aksa's disintegrate*, *fireball* became *Noanar's fireball*, and *power word: kill* became *Xanad's killer*; it even went so far as to provide the year they were introduced into the world. (Another site, it should be mentioned, has given Latin names to several spells as well.)

While there was never a restriction on the number of spells that existed within the game, the story element of spell value (and of magic-users avariciously hunting new spells for their spellbooks), certainly carried over:

> …(T)he ramifications of spell scarcity are bound to aid your campaign, and not only with regard to excess treasure and magic items. A scroll of but a single spell becomes highly meaningful to the magic-users in the game, especially when it is of a spell heretofore unknown. The acquisition of a book of spells from someplace in the dungeons or wildernesses of the campaign is a benison beyond price! PC and NPC alike will take great pains to guard scrolls and spell books. Magic-users will haunt dusty libraries and peruse musty tomes in the hopes of gleaning but a single incantation to add to

their store of magic.
—*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 39

However many spells a magic-user would learn on his or her own would always look to be supplemented by acquiring scrolls and books for any source; so much so, that the *DMG* devoted a section to handling players seeking to cozen spells from their hirelings and henchmen.

Evard

> "Shadow lives in the gaps. It fills them in, bridging the breaches between assumptions and reality, solid and ephemeral, light and dark, life and death. It is the heart of all my arts: illusion, nethermancy, and necromancy. Shadow is the most powerful force in creation, and it existed before the world. If one counts darkness as deeper shadow, it is far greater than light. Only a fool fails to acknowledge this. I am no fool. Are you, dear reader?"
> —Evard, *Legendry of Phantoms and Ghosts*

And here's where we finally get to Evard. As Gary Gygax noted when writing for the *Dying Earth RPG*, *Evard's black tentacles* was a spell derived from Vance's short story, "The Bagful of Dreams" (and thus, our connection). Although the story came out too late for the spell's inclusion in the 1st Edition *Player's Handbook*, it did make it into *Unearthed Arcana*:

Evard's Black Tentacles (Conjuration/Summoning)
Level: 4 **Components:** V, S, M
Range: 3" **Casting Time:** 8 segments
Duration: 1 round/level **Saving Throw:** None
Area of Effect: 30 sq. ft. per level of caster

Explanation/Description: By means of this spell the caster creates many rubbery, black tentacles in the area of effect of the dweomer. These waving members seem to spring forth from the earth, floor, or whatever surface is underfoot -- including water. Each tentacle is 10' long, AC 4, and takes as many points of damage to destroy as the magic-user who cast the spell has levels of experience. Furthermore, there will be one such tentacle for each of the levels of experience of the spell caster. Any creature within range of the writhing tentacles is subject to attack. If more than one target is within range of a tentacle, the probability of attack on each is determined and the result found by die roll. A victim of a tentacle attack must make a saving throw versus spell. If this succeeds, the victim takes 1-4 hit points of damage from initial contact with the tentacle, and it then is destroyed. Failure to save indicates that the damage inflicted will be 2-8 points, the ebon member is wrapped around its victim, and damage will be 3-12 points on the second and succeeding rounds. Since these tentacles have no intelligence to guide them, there is the possibility that they will entwine any object -- a tree, post, pillar -- or continue to squeeze a dead opponent. Once grasped, a tentacle remains wrapped around its chosen target until the tentacle is destroyed by some form of attack or it disappears due to the expiration of the dweomer's duration.

The component for this spell is a piece of tentacle from a giant octopus or giant squid.

Evard's past history established him as enemy of the mage Mordenkainen, crafter of spells, and author of the *Legendry of Phantoms and Ghosts* (originally a spell research book presented in *Dragon* #82 containing information on *phantom armor*, *phantom steed*, *phantom wind*, *Evard's black tentacle*, and *wraithform*). His *black tentacles* have also appeared in every edition of the game since then.

Evard's Black Tentacles
Conjuration (Creation)

Level:
Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Area: 20-ft.-radius spread
Duration: 1 round/level (D)
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

This spell conjures a field of rubbery black tentacles, each 10 feet long. These waving members seem to spring forth from the earth, floor, or whatever surface is underfoot -- including water. They grasp and entwine around creatures that enter the area, holding them fast and crushing them with great strength.

Every creature within the area of the spell must make a grapple check, opposed by the grapple check of the tentacles. Treat the tentacles attacking a particular target as a Large creature with a base attack bonus equal to your caster level and a Strength score of 19. Thus, its grapple check modifier is equal to your caster level +8. The tentacles are immune to all types of damage.

Once the tentacles grapple an opponent, they may make a grapple check each round on your turn to deal 1d6+4 points of bludgeoning damage. The tentacles continue to crush the opponent until the spell ends or the opponent escapes.

Any creature that enters the area of the spell is immediately attacked by the tentacles. Even creatures who aren't grappling with the tentacles may move through the area at only half normal speed.

Dark Legacy of Evard

4th Edition has since reestablished Evard as a great shadow wizard, and his grimoire -- *Legendry of Phantoms and Ghosts* -- as an authoritative text on shadow magic and the Shadowfell. Naturally, his *black tentacles* have also returned to the game (and its creature incarnation, *withering grasp*), along with *Evard's ebon bindings*, *dreadful mist*. You'll also see in *Heroes of Shadow* his *wrenching darkness*, *all-seeing worm*, and *black gate* spells.

Evard's Black Gate Enigmatic Mage Attack 20
A black disk yawns wide, expanding like an eye's pupil in the dark. From its dull surface emerge writhing black tentacles, which ensnare your foes and drag them into oblivion.

Daily ♦ **Arcane, Conjuration, Nethermancy, Shadow**
Minor Action Area wall 2 within 10 squares

Effect: You conjure a wall that lasts until the end of your next turn. The wall can be up to 2 squares high, and its squares are totally obscured. While in the wall, a creature is dazed and can attack only creatures adjacent to it. While the wall persists, you can use the secondary power at will.

Sustain Minor: The wall persists until the end of your next turn.

Secondary Power (Arcane, Implement, Necrotic, Nethermancy, Shadow)
Standard Action Close burst 5 centered on a square of the wall
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Intelligence vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + Intelligence modifier necrotic damage, and the target is pulled up to 2 squares toward the wall and into it, if possible. The target is restrained (save ends).

All of which leads us, of course, to the upcoming season of *D&D Encounters: Dark Legacy of Evard*. We hope this has given you some background on the mysterious mage -- and we look forward to seeing you Wednesday nights at your friendly local game store!